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U.N. Force Can Deploy to Sudan Without Government's Consent
(State's Silverberg says Secretary Rice will discuss Darfur at United Nations) (940)

By Stephen Kaufman
Washington File Staff Writer

Washington -- Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice and other foreign ministers attending the opening of the 61st U.N. General Assembly in New York will hold a "meeting of key partners" to discuss the humanitarian situation in the Darfur region of Sudan and how to proceed with the U.N. peacekeeping operation there.

Speaking at the State Department September 15, Assistant Secretary of State for International Organization Affairs Kristen Silverberg said that at the meeting, scheduled to occur during the week of September 18, the foreign ministers "will commit all of our governments to take steps to end the violence."

Asked if it would be possible for a U.N. force to be deployed without the consent of the Sudanese government, Silverberg said, "It's absolutely the case" under the terms of U.N. Security Council Resolution 1706, which authorized the peacekeeping force.

She said the United States had insisted that "there be no language in the resolution that required the explicit endorsement of the Sudanese government."

"Obviously, we would like their cooperation and support. We think that the likelihood of ending the violence is much better if we have support and cooperation from the government of Sudan, but it's not required," she said.

Sudan has continued to resist calls for it to consent to the peacekeeping force, which has been charged with replacing the overburdened African Union mission in the Darfur region.

Silverberg added that the Bush administration is continuing to hold discussions and work with the Sudanese government in order to "encourage their cooperation and consent," to the U.N. peacekeepers.

The purpose of Secretary Rice's meeting in New York will be to "call attention to the situation on the ground, [and] to talk about next steps," concerning how to deploy the peacekeeping operation "as soon as possible," how to strengthen the existing African Union Mission in Sudan (AMIS), and "how we can recommit all of our governments to take collective action, the full international community, to end the violence."

She said that there would be more to report after the meeting, but said "we expect this meeting to move the ball."

The U.N. Department of Peacekeeping Operations (DPKO) already has had "concrete conversations" with many countries about their willingness to contribute to the force, and Silverberg said she believes "the troops are out there."

However, a number of issues remain, "including will they [the peacekeepers] go into a permissive environment, a semi-permissive environment, or a hostile environment?"

At the United Nations, U.S. Ambassador John Bolton said September 15 that the United States is "gravely concerned over the deteriorating humanitarian situation in Darfur," including the possibility of new refugee flows into Chad, and a weak implementation of the region's Comprehensive Peace Agreement. He also expressed regret over the recent deaths of humanitarian workers.

"We must find a way to help reach a cessation of hostilities in Darfur, to help provide security for the civilians there, and to support a process of dialogue rather than use of arms," he said. "We look forward to the outcome of next week's meeting of the African Union Peace and Security Council and reiterate our call on the Government of Sudan to welcome deployment of a U.N. peacekeeping force in Darfur."

For additional information, see Darfur Humanitarian Emergency (<http://usinfo.state.gov/af/africa/darfur.html>).

UNITED STATES OPPOSES SECURITY COUNCIL SEAT FOR VENEZUELA

Assistant Secretary Silverberg was asked about the Bush administration's choice for a secretary-general to succeed Kofi Annan, whose term ends December 31.

She said the United States has not endorsed a candidate but is "very open-minded about the region from which the person comes," and is primarily focused upon finding a "good manager" who will continue reform of the United Nations and defend human rights.

"This isn't a talk shop, anymore, it's not just a political organization in New York, it's an organization that has more than 70,000 peacekeepers deployed, it has development and humanitarian programs all over the world. So we want somebody who's going to be a good manager and committed to continued reform of the United Nations," she said.

The assistant secretary also voiced U.S. opposition to the possibility of Venezuela gaining a nonpermanent seat on the Security Council. Venezuela is campaigning against Guatemala for the Latin American seat.

"[I]t's probably no great surprise that we don't think Venezuela would be the best partner on the Security Council," she said, citing the government's opposition to global anti-terror efforts and its support for Iran's nuclear ambitions.

Venezuela "demagogue[s] a lot of international mediums and [they] don't behave with seriousness, and at the same time Guatemala, we think, is a good country with a lot to contribute. They participate in peacekeeping missions. They represent the small countries of the U.N., which should have their turn on their Security Council," she said.

Silverberg also outlined Secretary Rice's schedule for the week of September 18, which includes meetings with her counterparts in the Security Council and other countries on topics such as Iran, Middle East peace efforts and Afghanistan.

Rice also will attend an event on countering trafficking in wildlife, September 22, which Silverberg said would be "a very interesting event around a partnership to promote wildlife conservation around the world by better enforcing laws against trafficking."

A transcript (<http://www.state.gov/p/io/rls/72344.htm>) of Silverberg's briefing is available on the State Department Web site.

For additional information about U.S. policy, see The United States and the United Nations (http://usinfo.state.gov/is/international_security/UNGA_2005.html).

(The Washington File is a product of the Bureau of International Information Programs, U.S. Department of State. Web site: <http://usinfo.state.gov>)

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*WPD502 09/15/2006

U.N. Member States Search for Answers to Migration Problems

(United States committed to legal, orderly, human migration in post-9/11 world) (450)

Washington – With its long tradition of accepting immigrants, the United States renewed its commitment September 15 to international cooperation in the voluntary, orderly movement of populations.

"The United States' commitment to promoting orderly migration as a positive development for all nations is firm and undiminished by the challenges of the post-9/11 world," said Assistant Secretary of State Ellen Sauerbrey, who oversees the Bureau of Population, Refugees and Migration. She spoke at the U.N. High-Level Dialogue of the General Assembly on International Migration and Development held September 14-15 in New York.

More than 120 nations were represented at the meeting, which gives particular focus to migration as it affects development.

"We are deeply and sincerely committed to promoting legal, orderly and humane international migration as an engine for economic growth and prosperity for all countries," Sauerbrey said. "We are also, without hesitation, fully committed to respect for the human dignity and human rights of migrants."

U.N. Secretary-General Kofi Annan has proposed a global forum on migration within which countries would have an ongoing discussion on the best practices, ideas and experiences for dealing with migration. (See related article (<http://usinfo.state.gov/is/Archive/2005/Oct/06-718298.html>).)

Belgium offered September 14 to host the first meeting in 2007 to launch an ongoing multilateral dialogue on the many issues facing the world's 190 million migrants.

Sauerbrey said the United States favors a regionally focused approach to resolution of migration concerns.

"In our experience, migration relationships work best between neighbors and neighborhoods, near and far, where there are common interests and concerns that lead to tangible outcomes," Sauerbrey said in her speech to a plenary session. "We are not interested in grand and elaborate global dialogues simply because we have seen the inherent weakness that results from the size and scope."

Sauerbrey said the United Nations and the international community have adequate fora for discussion of migration issues, citing the Global Migration Group and the International Organization of Migration.

As a nation that has welcomed migrants for more than 200 years, the United States has a long history of mistakes and experience with immigration. Sauerbrey offered the U.S. example to other nations that might be facing the issue for the first time.

"All the countries of the U.N. family have shared with us their people, their culture and their faiths, representing the magnificent glory and range and reach of God's human creation," Sauerbrey said.

For more information, see a fact sheet (<http://www.state.gov/g/prm/rls/fs/2006/72145.htm>) on the State Department Web site.

For ongoing coverage of this issue, see Immigration Reform (http://usinfo.state.gov/gi/global_issues/immigration.html).

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*WPD503 09/15/2006

Bush Calls for U.N. Force To Enter Sudan, Stop Genocide

(Also says Iran should not be allowed to "wait out" the international community) (620)

By Stephen Kaufman

Washington File White House Correspondent

Washington -- President Bush called on the United Nations to take "robust action" in Sudan and deploy a peacekeeping force to provide security in the troubled Darfur regions.

The United Nations' lack of action against the genocide in Darfur has been a source of frustration for him and other Americans, the president said during a September 15 press conference at the White House.

Bush said there are "other alternatives" to continuing to wait for the Sudanese government to invite the peacekeepers into the country, such as "passing a resolution saying we're coming in with a U.N. force in order to save lives."

"I'm frustrated with the United Nations in regards to Darfur," Bush said. "I have said and this government has said there's genocide taking place in the Sudan, and it breaks our collective hearts to know that."

The president said the best way to solve the crisis is to have both a political and a security track in the country, and said he had suggested that NATO provide support and logistics help for the U.N. force.

However, he said, the United Nations "hasn't acted," and added, "I can understand why those who are concerned about Darfur are frustrated. I am."

Bush said he was proud of U.S. humanitarian efforts in Sudan. "We provided by far the vast majority of food and aid," but said he is troubled by reports of escalating violence. "I can understand the desperation people feel for women being pulled out of these refugee centers and raped. And now is the time for the U.N. to act," he said.

For additional information, see Darfur Humanitarian Emergency (<http://usinfo.state.gov/af/africa/darfur.html>).

61ST U.N. GENERAL ASSEMBLY

Looking ahead to the opening of the 61st U.N. General Assembly in New York, Bush said he would be addressing the gathering of international leaders to talk about "our obligation to defend civilization and liberty, to support the forces of freedom and moderation throughout the Middle East."

The president also said the United Nations needs better management structures and accountability and he hopes the organization "would support my call to end tyranny in the 21st century."

"I'm going to have a strong message, one that's ... based upon hope and my belief that the civilized world must stand with moderate reformist-minded people and help them realize their dreams. I believe that's the call of the 21st century," he said.

Turning to Iran, Bush said there continues to be a "common" consensus against the country developing nuclear weapons and that he would warn U.N. member states against allowing the Iranian government to stall in its talks with the international community over the issue.

"[W]e need to move the process, and they need to understand we're firm in our commitment. And if they try to drag their feet or, you know, get us to look the other way ... we won't do that," he said. "[W]e're firmly committed in our desire to send a common signal to the Iranian regime."

The president also took questions on his plan to define U.S. obligations under Common Article 3 of the Geneva Conventions. He said any legislation passed by Congress must ensure intelligence officers and others conducting the CIA's interrogation program "have no doubt that what they're doing is legal."

"We're trying to set high standards, not ambiguous standards," Bush said.

A transcript (<http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2006/09/20060915-2.html>) of the president's press conference is available on the White House Web site.

For additional information, see The United States and the United Nations (http://usinfo.state.gov/is/international_security/UNGA_2005.html).

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*WPD504 09/15/2006

Economic, Political Improvements Will Help Reduce Iraqi Violence
(Military official says jobs for young Iraqi men is key to a winning strategy) (530)

By Jacquelyn S. Porth
Washington File Security Affairs Writer

Washington – Economic and political conditions have to improve throughout Iraq, including in the long restive al-Anbar province, says the commander of the Multinational Corps in Iraq.

During a September 15 videoconference from his headquarters in Iraq, U.S. Army Lieutenant General Peter Chiarelli acknowledged that significant challenges exist in Anbar, but said there are no plans to abandon coalition operations there.

"We are committed to the people of al-Anbar and will remaining committed ... and do everything possible to make their life better," he pledged.

The province needs economic and political support and when that flows in a sustained manner, Chiarelli said it would have a positive effect on security conditions there. (See related article (<http://usinfo.state.gov/xarchives/display.html?p=washfile-english&y=2006&m=September&x=20060914143952idybeekcm0.9316522>).)

In many places where he travels, Chiarelli said he hears the same Iraqi refrain: "Find jobs for the angry young men" and the level of violence will decrease. Economic development is key to improving conditions in Iraq, he said, and part of the overall strategy for victory. (See related article (<http://usinfo.state.gov/mena/Archive/2006/May/19-229741.html>).)

Chiarelli said coalition forces are looking to the Iraqi government to provide basic services in regional locations where people are feeling deprived.

Going back to the situation in Anbar, he said Iraq's security establishment is experiencing some personnel retention problems because the Iraqi Ministry of Defense has set certain literacy requirement for its recruits to meet.

Anbar is also the most recent province to be turned over to the Iraqi security forces. Even though some U.S. military forces have been shifted from Anbar to support the Baghdad security plan, the U.S. military official said he still believes sufficient troops remain in the province. If more forces are needed, the officer said a request for them will be made. (See related article (<http://usinfo.state.gov/xarchives/display.html?p=washfile-english&y=2006&m=September&x=20060913182814idybeekcm0.8360865>).)

Questioned by reporters at the Pentagon, Chiarelli said his troops clearly are "fighting to win" in Iraq. But he suggested that the fight in Iraq is different from any other the United States has experienced. He also suggested that the experience of fighting the insurgency in Iraq will be characteristic of other future U.S. military experiences.

"It is a blend of both kinetic [actions on the battlefield] and nonkinetic effects," he said, with the nonkinetic effects, such as generating jobs and rebuilding infrastructure, often being the most important.

Coalition forces are dependent on the Iraqi government to help in this process, Chiarelli said, and the sooner those commitments are realized, the faster places like Anbar will stabilize.

"I am very comfortable that we're moving in the right direction in al-Anbar," he added.

Chiarelli also was asked about border security. He said coalition and Iraqi forces are working very hard to secure Iraq's borders with both Syria and Iran. To that end, he said, 256 border forts have been established.

Having just returned from an inspection on the Iraqi-Iranian border, and having been apprised of the situation along the Iraqi-Syrian border, Chiarelli said the border teams are getting stronger every day.

For more information, see Iraq Update (http://usinfo.state.gov/mena/middle_east_north_africa/iraq.html).

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*WPD505 09/15/2006

Reforms Earning Countries Higher Incomes, World Bank Reports
(New governance indicators released ahead of annual Bank/IMF meetings) (650)

By Kathryn McConnell
Washington File Staff Writer

Washington -- Countries that invest in reforming their government can expect significant development gains and increased per capita incomes, the World Bank says.

In a September 15 press release on Governance Matters V: Worldwide Governance Indicators 1996-2005, Daniel Kaufmann, the bank's director of global governance, said reforming countries are finding that "good governance" is being recognized by foreign investors, aid donors, government officials and citizens "as crucial to higher living standards and poverty alleviation."

"Where there is resolute leadership and reform, improved governance outcomes can take place quickly," the bank said.

More and more aid organizations -- including the U.S. Millennium Challenge Corporation (MCC) -- are using these indicators to make aid allocation decisions, it said.

The announcement of the governance indicators precedes the annual meetings of the World Bank and International Monetary Fund (IMF) September 19-20 in Singapore. (See related article (<http://usinfo.state.gov/xarchives/display.html?p=washfile-english&y=2006&m=September&x=20060912132016SAikceinawz0.2876856>).)

At the meetings, the bank will present new initiatives for fighting corruption and increasing the focus on results.

Other key issues expected to receive attention at the meetings are progress toward development in Africa, and how better to engage civil society and youth in development decision-making, according to the bank.

GOVERNANCE

In 2005, \$4.5 billion -- nearly half of all new World Bank aid to developing countries -- included support for strengthening governance in areas such as tax and customs administration; rule of law; judicial and civil service performance; and effective and accountable provision of services by local and central governments, the bank said.

Increasingly, the bank is supporting the development of independent media and strengthening parliaments, it said.

The bank also used the governance indicators to evaluate more than 200 countries in such areas as adoption of reforms in government transparency, accountability and effectiveness, political stability, regulatory quality, quality of contract enforcement and measuring the abuse of power.

The bank cited Botswana, Ghana, Senegal, Sierra Leone, Mozambique and Liberia as making notable governance reforms during the past decade. Other poor countries, such as Slovenia, Chile and Estonia, score higher on rule of law and control of corruption than some industrialized countries, notably Greece and Italy, it said.

The World Bank is the largest provider of development assistance to Africa, doubling its aid between 2000 and 2005, according to reports.

The bank's strategy for helping Africa focuses on measurable results in expanding growth, trade and economic competitiveness, promoting private-sector job creation, promoting regional integration and cooperation, reducing and mitigating conflicts, and improving governance.

CIVIL SOCIETY AND YOUTH

The bank said that over the past two decades it has increased greatly its cooperation with civil-society organizations, which are involved with an estimated 72 percent of new projects financed by the World Bank.

The civil-society sector promotes public-sector accountability and transparency, and ensures that poor and marginalized people are heard by governments and are factored into development policy decisions, the bank said.

Civil society includes nongovernmental and charitable organizations, private foundations, faith-based groups, trade unions and indigenous groups.

The bank's investments in youth programs also doubled between 2000 and 2005.

To ensure that young people have a good start in life, the bank and the international community increasingly are working to incorporate into their policies the views of youths in order to improve their current lives and their future, it said.

Donors now are engaged in addressing "second generation services" for youth -- those beyond basic health care and education -- by seeking more information that will help them shape policies on such issues as unemployment, high rates of HIV/AIDS infection, and risky behaviors, the bank added.

Young people make up the fastest growing segment of the world population and 50 percent of the population of poor countries, according to the bank.

Additional information (<http://www.govindicators.org/>) about governance indicators is available on the World Bank Web site.

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*WPD506 09/15/2006

Trade Dispute Panel Sought on Auto Parts Exports to China
(Chinese charges on imported parts violate WTO agreement, United States says) (410)

By Peggy B. Hu
Washington File Staff Writer

Washington -- The United States, the European Union (EU) and Canada are requesting the World Trade Organization (WTO) establish a dispute settlement panel regarding China's treatment of imported auto parts, U.S. Trade Representative (USTR) Susan Schwab announced in a September 15 press release.

According to a USTR press release, China is imposing charges that "unfairly discriminate against imported auto parts and discourage automobile manufacturers in China from using imported auto parts in the assembly of vehicles."

Under China's regulations governing the import of auto parts, all vehicle manufacturers in China that use imported parts must register with China's Customs Administration and provide specific information about

each vehicle assembled, including a list of the imported and domestic parts to be used and the value and supplier of each part. If the number or value of imported parts in an assembled vehicle exceeds specified thresholds, the regulations assess each of the imported parts a charge equal to the tariff on complete automobiles (typically 25 percent) rather than the tariff applicable to auto parts (typically 10 percent).

"The United States believes that these charges are inconsistent with China's WTO obligations," the USTR said.

The United States and the EU requested WTO dispute settlement consultations on the issue March 30. (See related article (<http://usinfo.state.gov/eap/Archive/2006/Mar/30-612145.html>).)

The United States, Canada, and the EU subsequently held joint consultations with China in Geneva May 11 and 12. Australia, Japan and Mexico -- which also export auto parts to China -- participated in the consultations as third parties.

"Working together with Canada and the EU, we have tried to resolve this issue through consultations as we always prefer to negotiate rather than litigate, but China has demonstrated no willingness to remove its unfair charges," Schwab said.

"While we remain open to settling this dispute, China's current stance leaves us no choice but to proceed with our WTO case. We are committed to providing a level playing field for U.S. exporters to China and, as we have made clear, we will not hesitate to pursue dispute settlement if necessary," she said.

The full text (http://www.ustr.gov/Document_Library/Press_Releases/2006/September/United_States_Requests_WTO_Panel_in_Challenge_of_Chinas_Treatment_of_US_Auto_Parts.html) of the press release is available at the USTR's Web site.

Additional information (http://www.wto.org/english/tratop_e/dispu_e/dispu_e.htm) on the WTO's dispute settlement process and current cases is available on the WTO Web site.

For more information on U.S. policy, see The United States and China (http://usinfo.state.gov/eap/east_asia_pacific/china.html).

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*WPD507 09/15/2006

China Has Sophisticated Energy Strategy for Africa, Expert Says
(Analyst cites partnerships between China, African oil companies) (890)

By Jim Fisher-Thompson
Washington File Staff Writer

Washington -- In its need for more fuel to supply an expanding economy, China is pursuing a dynamic "holistic" approach to energy partnerships in Africa that has surprised many Western competitors, says South African Warrick Davies-Webb.

Davies-Webb, political analyst at Executive Research Associates, a risk-management consulting firm headquartered in Pretoria, South Africa, spoke at a September 13 briefing sponsored by the African Center for Strategic Studies (ACSS), a U.S. government agency located at Fort McNair near downtown Washington.

Established in 1999, ACSS sponsors seminars and training sessions for African midlevel military officers and defense officials. It recently opened an office in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, to oversee programs on the continent aimed at increasing the professional skill of African militaries while building closer ties with U.S. counterparts in the defense community.

With oil, gas and coal use far outstripping its productive capacity, "China faces a growing energy deficit that has great implications for Africa," Davies-Webb told his ACSS audience. Africa has become a "new terrain for energy battles" in which Chinese state oil companies seek "to lock in energy supplies throughout the continent."

Their approach has become surprisingly sophisticated over the past 10 years, leading to partnerships with African state oil companies that now account for more than 10 percent of China's total oil imports, Davies-Webb said. During that period, China invested more than \$4 billion in Sudan alone, he said.

As late as 2000, China's only energy presence was in Sudan, but today its involvement on the continent includes refineries in Algeria and Libya, pipeline construction in Sudan and Nigeria, oil production in Angola and exploration rights in Guinea-Bissau, as well as a number of other sub-Saharan African nations, Davies-Webb said.

In 2006 alone, China paid \$2.2 billion for exploration rights in a field off Nigeria's coast, and is "aggressively" expanding exploration of offshore fields in Angola, he added.

China's new "holistic approach" -- offering exploration, development and financing packages to its African partners -- is an "attractive competitive alternative to traditional Western companies" who do not have a similar "integrated package of carrots to offer," the analyst said.

For African nations in financial trouble or unwilling to meet the transparency and accountability requirements of the World Bank and other international lenders, a Chinese deal literally can mean an "alternative economic lifeline."

In 2003, when Angola "found itself facing a severe cash crisis, China stepped in with a \$2 billion loan the next year that bailed that country out." In Chad, where international lenders threatened to withdraw support from its new pipeline, "the Chinese were willing to offer an alternative package of technical assistance, if World Bank discussions broke off," Davies-Webb added.

Unlike U.S. government development agencies like the Millennium Challenge Corporation (MCC), the Chinese do not focus on human rights, anti-corruption or economic reform as requirements for their support, the analyst explained. This is a distinct draw to nations like Zimbabwe and Sudan, against whom the U.S. government, the European Union and the United Nations have imposed sanctions because of human rights violations.

At the same time, U.S. law has tightened up rules against corruption for American businesses operating overseas. The day Davies-Webb spoke, a former executive for the Houston-based energy company, Willbros Group Incorporated, pleaded guilty to violating the U.S. Foreign Corrupt Practices Act by conspiring to bribe officials in Nigeria and Ecuador and might face prison time.

On the macroeconomic level, "since all major economic decisions in China are made on a political level by the government and Communist Party, all deals are backed by them. Therefore, Chinese companies enjoy risk-free access to African markets; an advantage Western companies just don't have," the analyst added.

Entry into Chad's fledgling oil sector is a good example of the overall Chinese approach, where "you have had massive [Chinese] institutional support that includes trade, foreign aid packages," Davies-Webb said.

In addition, the Chinese also have fostered "strategic linkages" with small African oil companies that have political influence in places like Nigeria, for example, and with companies and banks in Portugal that have connections in countries like Angola.

Davies-Webb said the Chinese also have "piggybacked" on Nigerian oil companies going into Sao Tome and Principe offshore oil fields, while they have employed South African businessmen with influence in Angola "as useful Trojan horses to gain access to key political players" in that oil-rich country.

Portugal has played a "critical but very underestimated role" in facilitating oil deals for the Chinese, who regard the European nation as "their back door into the African oil sector," the analyst remarked.

China also has gone out of its way to cultivate relations with France, Davies-Webb said, because of that nation's traditional business relationship with many African nations and the belief that the French pose "a counterweight to U.S. influence" on the continent.

See also "China No Threat to United States in Africa, U.S. Official Says (<http://usinfo.state.gov/eap/Archive/2005/Jul/29-550683.html>)" and "China's Economic Focus on Africa is Mixed Picture, Scholar Says (<http://usinfo.state.gov/eap/Archive/2006/Jun/26-336377.html>)."

For more information on U.S. policy, see The United States and China (http://usinfo.state.gov/eap/east_asia_pacific/china.html), Africa (<http://usinfo.state.gov/af/>) and Trade and Economics (<http://usinfo.state.gov/ei/>).

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*WPD508 09/15/2006

Laura Bush Hosting White House Literacy Conference

("Reading changes lives," first lady says in advance of conference in New York) (1130)

By Judy Aita

Washington File Staff Writer

New York -- As world leaders gather for the opening of the U.N. General Assembly, U.S. first lady Laura Bush will be highlighting the importance of literacy for both individual and national growth by hosting the first White House Conference on Global Literacy September 18 at the New York Public Library.

"Literacy improves the lives of mothers and children. Literacy boosts economies. And literacy helps people make good, informed decisions about their health," she said in a conference announcement.

The conference will underscore the need for sustained global and national leadership in promoting literacy and will encourage greater international and private-sector involvement in literacy programs, according to Sonya Medina, director of projects for the White House Conference on Global Literacy. It also will highlight successful programs supported by the United States, UNESCO and private or local groups around the world.

Over 60 first ladies and spouses of leaders and education ministers are expected to attend, Medina said.

According to UNESCO, 780 million adults, two-thirds of whom are women, are unable to read. Another 100 million children worldwide are not in school. Eighty-five percent of the world's illiterate live in just 35 countries that are concentrated in regions of high poverty. In Washington, the first lady's chief of staff, Anita McBride, said representatives from 30 of these countries will attend the conference. The African region will be heavily represented, she added.

Laura Bush is honorary ambassador for the United Nations Literacy Decade. A former public school teacher and librarian, she has used her positions as first lady of Texas and first lady of the United States to highlight the importance of reading and education, especially for women and girls. Her dedication and support of literacy programs is seen in such projects as the first National Book Festival in Washington in 2001 and the teacher recruitment program Teach for America.

The first lady often recalls that as a child she loved listening to her mother read to her. Over her lifetime, she has realized how important that experience was and how critical such a simple gesture between mother and child is for children all over the world and the countries in which they live. In 2005, she visited 27 countries and was able to see reading programs at work in many places.

"Literacy is vital to strong, free societies. And reading changes lives," she said recently. "Mothers who can read raise children who can read. They can also make informed decisions that protect the health of their families and can participate in local economies. Literacy strengthens families just as it strengthens communities and societies."

Panels and discussions at the conference will focus on those three areas: mother-child literacy, literacy for health and literacy for economic self-sufficiency. Nine programs that are easily replicable will be showcased.

MOTHER -- A CHILD'S FIRST TEACHER

The first panel, entitled "Mother-Child Literacy and Intergenerational Learning," features programs that focus on mothers, children's first teachers. When mothers learn to read, they can impart those skills to their children, beginning a cycle of literacy that continues from one generation to the next.

Even in the United States, one-third of the children begin school without basic skills, Dr. Perri Klass, president of the U.S. Reach Out and Read National Center, said at a press conference September 14. Her program links health care and literacy by giving books to mothers at doctors' offices and clinics at least twice a year and encouraging them to read to their babies and young children.

The mother-child panel will also feature Maria Diarra Keita, director of the Institute for Popular Education in Mali, and Florence Molefe, facilitator of the Family Literacy Project in South Africa. The White House's McBride said there is excitement among conference organizers about Molefe's success in bringing literacy to areas where there is no running water or electricity. "Small steps in the least likely places" can inspire other educators in impoverished areas of the world, she said.

The second panel, "Literacy for Health" focuses on the importance of reading so adults can not only make informed decisions about their family's health, but also do basic things such as understand instructions on a medicine bottle.

In Afghanistan's rural communities women often are not allowed to leave their homes to attend school, said Hasina Mojadidi, instructional development coordinator for Learning for Life. Her program began working with women at home teaching basic health issues. As the program has progressed, she said, men have seen the value and encouraged not only their wives, but also their daughters, to study. "Mrs. Bush stands with the women of Afghanistan," said McBride. In 2005, the first lady visited the Women's Teacher Training Institute, where men and women teachers are trained in separate classrooms.

"In many cases, it's the man who needs to be educated, and cultures need to be changed, but it needs to be done with the people's support," said Randall Tobias, head of the U.S. Agency for International Development, a partner in hosting the literacy conference.

Other health-related literacy projects will be presented by Gonzalo Fiorilo of Bolivia, and by Salah Sabri Sebeh of Egypt.

LEARNING BASIC BUSINESS SKILLS

The third panel features programs that help women learn basic business skills that generate income, foster independence, and boost local economies.

In Burkina Faso, 90 percent of women are illiterate and 85 percent of women are agricultural workers, said Koumba Boly Barry, coordinator for development and cooperation, Program for Literacy and Training. Her program targets women in agriculture, helping them develop income-generating activities and teaching needed skills.

Both men and women are beginning to see the difference education is making, Barry said. "We also show them that as they become successful, the country is becoming more successful."

The panel on literacy's effect on economic well-being will also feature Regina Celia Esteves de Siqueira, who is chief executive of a nonprofit literacy program in Brazil, and Krishna Mohan Rao, an education expert for the government of Andhra Pradesh, India, who will talk about award-winning programs in India.

McBride said UNESCO's director general, Koichiro Matsuura, will announce follow-up, regional literacy conferences that will take place during the next two years. She said she was certain that there would be such a follow-up conference in Africa.

Additional information (<http://www.globalliteracy.gov/>) on the White House Conference on Global Literacy will be available on its Web site, including videos of the presentations, conference news, speeches, and links to partner Web sites in four languages: English, French, Spanish and Arabic.

Elizabeth Kelleher contributed to this article from Washington.

(The Washington File is a product of the Bureau of International Information Programs, U.S. Department of State. Web site: <http://usinfo.state.gov>)
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*WPD509 09/15/2006

U.S. Officials Urge China To Improve Nonproliferation Efforts

(Say Beijing's best strategic interest lies in enforcing international norms) (1080)

By Susan Krause

Washington File Staff Writer

Washington -- China must demonstrate greater leadership in addressing the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, officials from the Bush administration said in testimony before a federal government commission September 14.

Recent events, including the July 4 test-launch of several missiles by North Korea and the militant Islamic resistance movement Hezbollah's use of Chinese-designed "Silkworm" cruise missiles in strikes against Israeli naval vessels on July 15 demonstrate the effect of China's behavior, according to Peter Rodman, assistant secretary of defense for international security affairs.

Despite repeated assurances from the Chinese government that it opposes the proliferation of materials and technology used in the production and delivery of weapons of mass destruction (WMD), the United States government remains concerned about lapses in enforcement, says Paula DeSutter, assistant secretary of state for verification, compliance and implementation.

Rodman and DeSutter appeared at a hearing of the U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission (USCC), a congressionally mandated body charged with monitoring the national security implications of trade and economic ties between the United States and China.

"China's nonproliferation efforts have shown some improvement over the past several years," DeSutter said. "Unfortunately, Chinese entities' record of transferring WMD and missile technologies and materials -- and the record of the Chinese government's enforcement of its own laws and regulations to stem these transfers -- remains unsatisfactory."

SERIAL PROLIFERATORS

Chinese entities, including state-owned companies, have transferred weapons technologies to countries around the world, the officials said, including "states of concern" such as Iran, North Korea, Sudan, Burma, Zimbabwe, Cuba and Venezuela.

"In some of these cases, Chinese authorities declare that they have taken direct action against firms and tightened export controls to close loopholes, but these measures are uneven and the problematic activity continues," Rodman said.

DeSutter said the United States particularly is concerned about "serial proliferators," a limited number of entities that, through repeated actions, have been responsible for much of the proliferation problem.

In June, the U.S. government imposed sanctions on four Chinese entities pursuant to Executive Order 13382, which blocks U.S.-based property of WMD proliferators and their supporters. The entities -- Beijing Alite Technologies Company Ltd. (ALCO), LIMMT Economic and Trade Company Ltd., China Great Wall Industry Corporation (CGWIC), and China National Precision Machinery Import-Export Corporation (CNPMIEC) were designated as suppliers of financial, material, technological or other support for Iran's missile programs. (See related article (<http://usinfo.state.gov/xarchives/display.html?p=washfile-english&y=2006&m=June&x=20060613155945ajesrom5.230129e-03>).)

Pressure from the United States has been an essential factor in improving China's behavior, DeSutter said.

"The imposition, or even the mere threat of sanctions, can be an influential tool for changing behavior, as few countries or companies wish to be labeled publicly as irresponsible," she said.

TIES WITH IRAN, NORTH KOREA

China has long-standing relationships with both Iran and North Korea, Rodman told the commission, but its actions in the proliferation area seem "dangerously shortsighted."

The United States has been concerned that China has engaged in significant transfers of conventional weapons to Iran and has assisted Iran in developing ballistic missile, nuclear, and chemical programs.

"This is not consistent with China's natural interest in Middle East stability," Rodman said.

China's decision to support U.N. Security Council Resolution 1696, which demands that Iran suspend enrichment of uranium by August 31, suggested that it was willing to confront the potential threat posed by Iran's nuclear activities, he said. (See related article (<http://usinfo.state.gov/xarchives/display.html?p=washfile-english&y=2006&m=August&x=20060823161526esnamfuak0.3918115>).)

"Unfortunately, China has joined Russia in a reluctance to back up this vote with action," he said.

Historically, China has supplied military technology to North Korea, Rodman said, providing dual-use missile-related items, raw materials and other forms of assistance well into the 1990s.

In more recent times, he added, China has been a major supplier of food and fuel to North Korea, and has played a leading role in the Six-Party Talks seeking to end nuclear programs on the Korean

Peninsula. (See The U.S. and the Korean Peninsula (http://usinfo.state.gov/eap/east_asia_pacific/north_korea.html).)

"We recognize and appreciate the important contributions China has made in recent years to organize and host the Six-Party Talks," Rodman said. "Nonetheless, China, as the country with the most leverage over North Korea, can and should do more."

North Korea's missile tests "demonstrate that China's past tolerance of North Korea's provocative behavior has indirectly eroded the very stability it claims to seek," Rodman said. He welcomed China's decision to vote in favor of Security Council Resolution 1695, condemning the launches. (See related article (<http://usinfo.state.gov/xarchives/display.html?p=washfile-english&y=2006&m=July&x=20060715174904atiayduj0.3738367>).)

Rodman urged China to reassess its relations with Pyongyang and Teheran.

"United States policy is to encourage China not only to take its proper place in the international system, but to take on its appropriate share of international leadership," he said. "A commitment to peace and stability is an important component of that."

In the cases of both Iran and North Korea, Rodman cautioned, "the dangers to regional and global stability are increasing, and the time is right for Beijing to think hard about its relationships and its interests. We believe that China's approach for too long has been one of shielding these regimes from the consequences of their dangerous behavior."

A STRATEGIC INTEREST IN NONPROLIFERATION ENFORCEMENT

Rodman acknowledged that China is taking steps to improve its export controls and reduce its transfers of WMD-related technologies.

"The fact remains, however, that Chinese entities today remain key sources of transfers of arms, WMD- and missile-related equipment and technologies including dual-use technology and related military capabilities, to countries of concern," he said. "These transfers do considerable harm to regional stability."

He urged China to address areas of concern by strengthening its export licensing procedures, border controls and detection capabilities, and by implementing more rigorous enforcement and prosecution.

"We take China at its word that it has an interest in stability," he said, "and it is our hope that China will come to the calculation that its best strategic interest lies in enforcing international non-proliferation norms."

DeSutter acknowledged that U.S. engagement with China on nonproliferation issues could be "contentious." However, U.S. concerns with China "are not irremediable," she said.

For more information on U.S. policy, see The United States and China (http://usinfo.state.gov/eap/east_asia_pacific/china.html) and Arms Control and Non-Proliferation (http://usinfo.state.gov/is/international_security/arms_control.html).

The texts of DeSutter's (http://www.uscc.gov/hearings/2006hearings/written_testimonies/06_09_14wrts/06_09_14_desutter_state_ment.php) and Rodman's (http://www.uscc.gov/hearings/2006hearings/written_testimonies/06_09_14wrts/06_09_14_rodman_state_ment.pdf) prepared statements are available on the USCC Web site.

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U.N. Security Council Sets Formal Review of Situation in Burma
(U.S. Ambassador Bolton welcomes "significant" decision) (470)

By Judy Aita
Washington File United Nations Correspondent

United Nations -- U.S. Ambassador John Bolton hailed the Security Council's September 15 decision to schedule a formal review of the situation in Burma, calling the move significant.

"This is a major step forward for President Bush's effort to bring the attention of the international community to the situation inside Burma and its effects on the region," Bolton told journalists after the closed Security Council session. "We intend to press ahead vigorously."

According to the U.N. Charter, the Security Council only addresses issues that pose a threat to international peace and security. Flows of Burmese refugees throughout the Southeast Asia region, illicit narcotics, the risk of HIV/AIDS and the human rights situation inside Burma constitute such a threat, Bolton said.

The United States has pressed for almost a year to have the issue officially placed on the council's agenda. Earlier in September, Bolton said he would ask for a vote if he did not have unanimous support for a formal review. (See transcript (<http://usinfo.state.gov/xarchives/display.html?p=texttrans-english&y=2006&m=September&x=20060911144650xrsmada0.6825525>).)

Faced with strong opposition from China, the council took action September 15 during consultations, voting 10 to 4 with one abstention. "It is fundamentally important that the regime in Burma recognize that it's the other member governments of the U.N. -- the other nations in the world -- that are concerned about their practices," Bolton said.

The first step, Bolton said, was "to get the item formally inscribed on the agenda and follow it with a briefing."

"We're going to watch developments in and around Burma very carefully and we'll make a decision on what our next step will be on that basis," he said. The ambassador added that the council would schedule a briefing by U.N. Undersecretary-General Ibrahim Gambari by the end of September.

Gambari is scheduled to visit Burma, known officially at the United Nations as Myanmar, later this year.

The Security Council decision and the planned briefing are important steps that will strengthen the U.N. official's mission, Bolton said.

According to U.S. officials, the United States plans to sponsor a resolution calling for an all-inclusive political process and the release of opposition leader Aung San Suu Kyi and other political prisoners. The resolution would also call on the Burmese regime to ensure access and security for humanitarian workers, to take steps to end violence against the ethnic Karen minority, and to address HIV/AIDS and trafficking in drugs and persons.

During the opening of the 61st General Assembly session September 18, U.S. first lady Laura Bush will host a round-table discussion on Burma at the United Nations to raise awareness of the humanitarian crisis.

For further information, see U.S. Support for Democracy in Burma (http://usinfo.state.gov/eap/east_asia_pacific/burma.html).

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Free Trade Vital to Latin American Economies, Says U.S. Official
(USTR's Eissenstat cites need for free-trade pacts, renewed Doha trade talks) (960)

By Lauren Monsen
Washington File Staff Writer

Washington -- Free-trade agreements and a strong commitment to regional economic integration will help Latin America compete successfully in the global market, says Everett Eissenstat, assistant U.S. trade representative for the Americas.

In his September 15 remarks to the 10th annual Miami Herald Conference, which examined "How Will Latin America Compete in a Global Economy," Eissenstat cited trends that point to the benefits of a free-market approach. Although "there isn't a simple, straightforward answer" that will guarantee success, the removal of trade barriers is a prerequisite for sustained economic growth, he said.

"[O]ne thing that is clear from recent years is that countries [that] have been willing to undertake free-market reforms and pursue regional integration, particularly through ambitious trade agreements with the United States, have emerged as strong competitors both at the regional level and in the global marketplace," he said. "Trade agreements such as NAFTA [the North American Free Trade Agreement] and the U.S.-Chile [free-trade pact] are compelling examples of trade's power to build ties, revitalize economies, diversify exports, and attract higher-paying jobs."

Eissenstat also pointed to the U.S.-Central America-Dominican Republic Free Trade Agreement (CAFTA) -- which links the economies of the United States, the Dominican Republic, El Salvador, Nicaragua, Honduras, Guatemala and Costa Rica -- as proof that trade pacts are effective engines for growth. "In the relatively short amount of time CAFTA has been in force, we have already begun to hear positive stories from U.S. companies conducting business in the region," he observed. "We expect [U.S. trade pacts with] Peru and Colombia, once passed by Congress and fully implemented, to follow in the same successes of our trading partners in the region."

The drive toward regional economic integration began with NAFTA, which entered into force in 1994, he recalled. By inaugurating free trade among Mexico, Canada and the United States, "the agreement has contributed to economic growth in North America," said Eissenstat. "For goods, our total trade with Canada and Mexico has more than doubled from pre-NAFTA levels."

Moreover, "by establishing a framework to promote a secure and predictable [business] environment, investment too has blossomed under the NAFTA," he said. "Today, the NAFTA partners are investing more in each other's economies, and the rest of the world is also investing more in our economies."

The enactment of the U.S.-Chile Free Trade Agreement is showing promise as well, he reported. "Though relatively new, early results from our bilateral trade agreement [with Chile] tell a similar story," said Eissenstat. "In the first two years, bilateral trade between the U.S. and Chile increased 85 percent." (See related article (<http://usinfo.state.gov/xarchives/display.html?p=washfile-english&y=2003&m=May&x=20030527160916nesnom0.8975183>).)

In short, "these agreements work," he said. "They provide real opportunities to workers throughout the region and enhance the economic competitiveness of our hemisphere."

Because free-trade pacts now have a proven track record, "other nations in the hemisphere are seeking to follow a similar path as their regional neighbors" by negotiating their own trade agreements with the United States, he added. "In December 2005, Peru was the first Andean country to close and sign a free-trade deal with the United States," said Eissenstat. "This was a significant accomplishment for both Peru and the United States." (See related article (<http://usinfo.state.gov/wh/Archive/2005/Dec/08-625986.html>).)

Although legislative approval of the U.S.-Peru trade deal is still pending, "we are hopeful that the agreement can be submitted to the Congress in time for consideration this year and we are working hard toward that goal," he said.

Also, "the United States and Colombia concluded a similar comprehensive agreement in February 2006," said Eissenstat. "In addition to transforming a preferential trade relationship [that favored Colombia] ... into a reciprocal, permanent, and comprehensive one, the United States-Colombia Trade Promotion Agreement will advance the strategic agenda of economic progress, stability and security in the Andean region" as a whole. (See related article (<http://usinfo.state.gov/wh/Archive/2006/Feb/27-250339.html>).)

"Like the Peruvian agreement, the U.S.-Colombia [trade pact] will eliminate tariffs and other barriers to goods and services, promote economic growth, and expand trade" between the two signatory parties, he said. Eissenstat predicted that the U.S.-Colombia pact, now awaiting congressional action, will "likely ... be considered early next year."

Finally, Eissenstat urged renewed action on the stalled Doha round of World Trade Organization talks. Reviving these negotiations should be a priority for Latin America, he said. "Developing countries could potentially be the largest beneficiaries of an ambitious outcome to Doha [talks]," he said. "Many of the Latin American economies have competitive agriculture sectors, so ... improving market access in agriculture could produce significant benefits for them globally." (See related article (<http://usinfo.state.gov/xarchives/display.html?p=washfile-english&y=2006&m=August&x=20060820155349attocnich0.3718531>).)

Eissenstat also reiterated his belief in the importance of regional economic integration, which he described as a critical element in building the hemisphere's future. "As measured by the amount of intraregional exports relative to its exports to the rest of the world, currently Latin America is among the least integrated regions of the world -- just ahead of the Middle East and Africa, but significantly below the developing economies of Asia and Europe. By making significant commitments to open its markets in the Doha negotiations, Latin America can accelerate intraregional growth and potentially become a major competitor on a global scale."

"The United States stands committed to this process, and we will continue reaching out to our trading partners and exploring ways to put the negotiations on a track toward a strong outcome," he said.

For more information on U.S. policy, see Trade and Economics (<http://usinfo.state.gov/ei/#latest>) and Regional Trade (http://usinfo.state.gov/wh/americas/regional_trade.html).

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Restorative Justice Brings Reconciliation to Colombia
(Partnership for a Better Life) (360)

In Colombia, a half century of guerrilla warfare has challenged the ability of the justice system to reintegrate former combatants into civil society. Judicial and penal systems are overwhelmed. High levels

of crime and domestic violence in some urban areas have taxed the efforts of the traditional justice system to rehabilitate offenders successfully and prevent the recurrence of conflict and violence.

The Alliance for Restorative Justice, Coexistence and Peace, based in Cali, joins the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) with several Colombian institutions to introduce ways to restore justice and mitigate the negative impacts of the country's troubled history. By applying the restorative justice model pioneered in South Africa, Northern Ireland and other post-conflict settings, the alliance provides a way for Colombia to meet its future and heal the wounds of its past.

The highly effective application of restorative justice principles enables gang members and other juvenile offenders to recommit to peaceful lives within their communities. These principles include accepting responsibility and the offer of reparations for damages caused by the opposing side, forgiveness, and reconciliation between parties.

The model has influenced legislation for demobilizing and reintegrating former combatants. Five new restorative justice centers have been established to serve hundreds of marginalized urban households. And some 3,500 rural households were provided with conflict-management training and agricultural extension services to prevent domestic and community violence and improve livelihoods.

In addition, humanitarian law and restorative justice curricula have been introduced at Colombian universities.

This approach also can be replicated in other countries in Latin America to further social development. To facilitate the process, USAID sponsored the first international meeting on restorative justice in Colombia in 2005.

Conference keynote speaker, Archbishop Desmond Tutu of South Africa, said: "The central concern [of restorative justice] is not retribution or punishment ...[but rather] the healing of breaches, the redressing of imbalances, the restoration of broken relationships, [and] a seeking to rehabilitate both the victim and the perpetrator, who should be given the opportunity to be reintegrated into the community he has injured by his offense."

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*WPD513 09/15/2006

Time of Opportunity for Latin America, Says U.S. Commerce Secretary
(Gutierrez announces new competitiveness forum, calls for vote in Cuba) (810)

By Scott Miller
Washington File Staff Writer

Washington -- With an unprecedented number of elected governments and progress made in attracting investment and undertaking economic reforms, this is a time of great opportunity for Latin America, and the key to regional competitiveness is a commitment to a pro-growth, pro-education agenda, according to U.S. Secretary of Commerce Carlos Gutierrez.

In September 15 remarks at the 10th annual Miami Herald Americas conference entitled "How Will Latin America Compete in a Global Economy," Gutierrez outlined his prescription for enhancing regional competitiveness and called for a referendum in Cuba on the current regime.

Gutierrez said there are more democratically elected governments in Latin America than ever before. He added that even though there is a perception that the region is veering toward the left politically -- and toward radicalism and populism -- the majority of these left-leaning regional leaders are pro-democracy

and pro-business and investment, and they understand that what matters is the results they deliver for their people.

And progress is being made in that direction, said Gutierrez. He pointed out that foreign direct investment in the region almost doubled from 2003 to 2004, and he observed that the region grew at the robust rate of 4.3 percent in 2005. As part of this process, Gutierrez explained, reformers in the region simplified business regulations, strengthened property rights, reduced tax burdens and increased access to credit.

Despite this positive trend, Gutierrez cautioned that much more must be done to compete for capital in the global economy, and he encouraged regional government to pursue business investment.

"What successful leaders know is that business investment brings a multitude of benefits, including jobs and more revenue for health and education," he said. "Business investment helps an entire country. Business investment helps advance social justice."

Gutierrez said that the Bush administration understands the importance of business investment and will convene the first Western Hemisphere Competitiveness Forum in the spring of 2007. This forum, he said, "will be an excellent opportunity to work on policies and strategies that attract investment and promote free enterprise throughout the region."

EDUCATION

Even as Latin American leaders are working to enhance regional competitiveness and to fulfill the region's potential, education represents the region's single biggest challenge, said Gutierrez.

"Education is the ticket to a better life," he said. "Education gives everyone the tools to succeed. It's not about giving people charity. It's about opportunity. And education in a free society leads to the greatest opportunities. ... That's real social justice."

Gutierrez cited the case of Ireland as a formerly poor European country that has enacted economic reforms, pursued free trade and invested heavily in education as a model for Latin America.

"Today Ireland is a Celtic Tiger ... the envy of Europe," he said. "I believe there are many Irelands in Latin America. This can be Latin America's time. Latin America can do it."

CUBA

Gutierrez applauded efforts by the democratically elected leaders of the Western Hemisphere to craft an agenda for greater competitiveness and social justice, and added that he always is surprised when people use the term "social justice" to describe Cuba.

"Think about Cuba: the Cuban government has had 47 years to improve the lives of the people of Cuba," he said. "Today, when most of Latin America is poised to seize the opportunities of the 21st century, Cuba is stuck in the middle of the 20th century."

Gutierrez said that the United States stands ready to assist Cuba in making a transition to democracy, but will not do business with Cuban dictator Fidel Castro's younger brother Raul, who has assumed control of the island nation during his elder brother's ongoing health crisis. Gutierrez described the younger Castro as simply another military dictator.

Instead, Gutierrez said the Cuban people themselves should decide how they are to be governed. He cited the case of Chile, which two decades ago also was ruled by a dictatorship, until the decision was made to hold a referendum to ask the people what they wanted. The Chilean people, Gutierrez recalled, said "no" to dictatorship -- and the time has come, he added, to present the Cuban people with the same choice.

"I say to the Cuban regime: why not ask the people? Let the Cuban people speak. Let the Cuban people determine their own destiny," Gutierrez said. "Why would a real leader be insecure about giving his people a voice?"

The Cuban-born Gutierrez concluded his remarks by saying: "A democratic referendum would be a victory for social justice, and a victory for the Cuban people."

The full text (

http://www.commerce.gov/opa/speeches/Secretary_Gutierrez/2006/September/15_Miami_Herald_Americas_Miami.htm) of the secretary's remarks, as prepared for delivery, is available on the Department of Commerce Web site.

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*WPD514 09/15/2006

Increased Security Seen as Spur to Latin America Economic Growth
(Commander of U.S. Southern Command speaks at Miami conference) (460)

By Eric Green
Washington File Staff Writer

Washington -- Economic growth rates in Latin America and the Caribbean will improve if the region is seen as a secure place to invest, says General Bantz Craddock, the commander of the U.S. Southern Command (SOUTHCOM).

In September 14 remarks at a conference in Miami, Craddock said military and police forces acting alone cannot bring about prosperity and make the Latin America/Caribbean region more competitive in the global economic environment.

But increased stability "through national and public security will set the conditions necessary" to overcome the "challenges and obstacles confronting many nations" in the Latin American region, said Craddock, who heads the Miami-based SOUTHCOM, which is responsible for providing contingency planning, operations and security cooperation in the Latin America/Caribbean region.

Craddock told an audience at the Miami Herald Americas Conference that "money is a coward. It only goes where it is safe. It will not go where there is danger and instability." Craddock said countries that focus on "increasing security and improving the economic security of the business environment will attract private investment and generate revenue."

The SOUTHCOM chief quoted reports that said Latin America and the Caribbean continue to lag behind other regions in key competitiveness indicators. To compete in the global economy, Craddock said, regional leaders and business executives will be faced with "hard choices regarding national, public and economic security."

Craddock said that "while the difficulty of choices associated with national and public security will most likely have to do with the allocation of scarce government resources, the decisions regarding economic security will present the greatest challenges to those making them." Craddock said economic security refers in a "broad sense to the preservation of those conditions necessary" for a nation to compete in the global market.

The military official said the Latin America/Caribbean region's macroeconomic conditions have been positive over the last few years. Craddock said presents "tremendous opportunity." But on the down side, he said, experts forecast that Latin America and the Caribbean will be the slowest-growing region in

the developing world. Total investments in infrastructure have been about 2 percent of the regional gross domestic product -- while investment rates in China and other Asian and East European countries are three times higher, he said.

To "avert the bust that seems to always follow Latin America's booms," Craddock said reform in the region "can no longer be deferred." Most important, he said, "the region must recommit to respect for property -- contracts and the rule of law," or capital "will flee to the greener pastures of Asia, Europe, and North America."

For more on U.S. policy, see The Americas (<http://usinfo.state.gov/wh>).

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*WPD515 09/15/2006

United States Promotes Religious Freedom for All, Rice Says
(2006 report examines 197 countries' commitment to religious freedom) (430)

By Michelle Austein
Washington File Staff Writer

Washington -- "The United States seeks to promote religious freedom and tolerance and build a more peaceful world for the peoples of all faiths," Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice said at the release of the International Religious Freedom Report September 15.

The U.S. Department of State released the eighth annual report to Congress September 15. The 2006 report examines 197 countries' commitment to advancing religious freedom. (See related article (<http://usinfo.state.gov/xarchives/display.html?p=washfile-english&y=2006&m=September&x=20060914164724hmnietua0.1669384>).)

The United States hopes the report will serve as a resource for those who share concerns about religious freedom, Rice said. "We also hope that it will serve as a source of encouragement to those whose plight is documented in the report and whose right to believe and practice and worship as they choose is still denied by their governments."

Events over the past year, including the incidents surrounding the printing of cartoons depicting the Prophet Muhammad in European newspapers, "have shown the need to go beyond the protection of religious freedom in law to a concerted effort to create the conditions for harmony, mutual understanding and respect within our societies," said Ambassador-at-Large for International Religious Freedom John Hanford.

Many governments are taking important steps to improve religious freedom, according to Hanford. For example, in Afghanistan the government is seeking to uphold constitutional guarantees of religious freedom despite a long-standing culture of intolerance. In Turkmenistan, additional religious groups have been able to obtain legal status.

The report also documents governments that routinely suppress religious freedom, including those of Eritrea and China, which use repressive registration laws as a means of restricting nonapproved religions or outlaw certain faiths entirely, Hanford said. In particular, Hanford said, Uzbekistan has further tightened its laws on religion, and congregations have been harassed and deregistered. Some Muslims in that nation have been arrested inappropriately, Hanford added.

The fifth anniversary of the September 11, 2001, attacks was a reminder that "the entire world is threatened by the extremist ideology of hate and bigotry and religious intolerance," Rice said.

"Religious freedom is deeply rooted in our principals and our history as a nation. And it is now integral to our efforts to combat terrorism and the ideology of hatred that fuels it," Rice said.

Transcripts of Rice's remarks (<http://www.state.gov/secretary/rm/2006/72267.htm>) and Hanford's remarks (<http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/rm/2006/72303.htm>) are available on the State Department Web site, as are the full texts of the 2006 report (<http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/irf/2006/>) and previous reports (<http://www.state.gov/g/drl/irf/rpt/>).

For more information, see International Religious Freedom (http://usinfo.state.gov/dhr/human_rights/intl_religious_freedom.html) and Democracy Dialogues' Freedom of Religion (http://www.democracy.gov/dd/eng_democracy_dialogues/religion.html).

(The Washington File is a product of the Bureau of International Information Programs, U.S. Department of State. Web site: <http://usinfo.state.gov>)
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(U.S. seeks to promote freedom of religion, conscience throughout the world) (9030)

(begin text)

International Religious Freedom Report 2006

Released by the Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor
U.S. Department of State
September 15, 2006

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Annual Report

The purpose of this report is to document the actions of governments — those that repress religious expression, persecute innocent believers, or tolerate violence against religious minorities, as well as those that respect, protect, and promote religious freedom. We strive to report equally on abuses against adherents of all religious traditions and beliefs. The governments we report on range from those that provided a high level of protection for religious freedom in the broadest sense (those that "generally respected" religious freedom) to totalitarian regimes that sought to control religious thought and expression and regarded some or all religious groups as threats.

The promotion of religious freedom is a core objective of U.S. foreign policy and is part of the U.S. Department of State's mission. The commitment of the United States to religious freedom and to international human rights standards is also articulated in such documents as Article 18 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which clearly states that everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion. As an expression of our deep national commitment to these freedoms, the department monitors religious persecution and discrimination worldwide, recommends and implements policies directed toward regions and countries, and develops programs to promote religious freedom. Through transformational diplomacy, the United States seeks to promote freedom of religion and conscience throughout the world as a fundamental human right and as a source of stability for all countries. In so doing, it strives to assist newly formed democracies in implementing freedom of religion and conscience, assist religious and human rights NGOs in promoting religious freedom, and identify and promote changes in the policies and actions of regimes that severely persecute their citizens or others on the basis of religious belief.

The large majority of the world's people have religious beliefs, which they hold dear. It is because religion is viewed by people as having such a central place in their lives that many regard religious freedom as the most important right. At the same time, global trends, regional distinctions, local preferences, and personal histories often lead to significant overlap between religious identity and ethnicity, class, language group, or political affiliation. The right to religious freedom can be abused in many ways both blatant and subtle. The following typology, although far from exhaustive, represents the major types of abuses identified in this report, and may serve as a helpful guide to assessing trends in religious freedom: totalitarian/authoritarian regimes, state hostility toward minority religions, state neglect of societal discrimination, discriminatory legislation that favors majority religions, and denunciation of certain religions as cults.

The first and most stark category of abuses is seen in totalitarian and authoritarian regimes, which seek to control religious thought and expression. Such regimes regard some or all religious groups as enemies of the state because of their religious beliefs or their independence from central authority. Some governments are hostile and repressive towards particular groups, often identifying them as "security threats." It is important to distinguish between groups of religious believers who express legitimate political grievances, and those that misuse religion to advocate violence against other religious groups or the state. This report documents it as an abuse when a government broadly represses religious expression among a peacefully practicing population on the grounds of security concerns. For example, the war on terror must not be used as an excuse to repress peaceful worship. The report also notes those countries and situations in which authorities' over-zealous actions taken against observant believers suspected of extremism have had the principal effect of restricting religious freedom. In some countries, for example, many are afraid to attend mosque frequently lest the government characterize them as religious extremists.

A second category of abuses occurs with state hostility toward minority or non- approved religions. These governments implement policies designed to demand that adherents recant their faith, cause religious group members to flee the country, or intimidate and harass certain religious groups. This report notes, for example, when state repression of religious groups was linked to ethnic identity because a government dominated by a majority ethnic group suppressed the faith of a minority group. Also detailed in this report are instances where governments used an individual's religious devotion as a proxy for determining his or her political ideology, which resulted in the intimidation and harassment of certain religious groups.

Yet a third kind of abuse stems from a state's failure to address either societal discrimination or societal abuses against religious groups. In these countries, legislation may discourage religious discrimination and persecution, but officials fail to prevent conflicts, harassment, or other harmful acts against minority religious groups. Protecting religious freedom is not just a matter of having good laws in writing. It requires active work by a government at all levels to prevent abuses by governmental or private actors, to bring abusers to justice, and to provide redress to victims, when appropriate. Governments have the responsibility to ensure that their agents do not commit abuses of religious freedom, and to protect religious freedom by rule of law in a way that ensures that private actors obey. In addition, governments must foster an environment of respect and tolerance for all people. This report documents cases in which a government has failed to prevent violations of religious freedom, or has not responded with consistency and vigor to violations of religious freedom by private actors, nongovernmental entities, or local law enforcement officials.

In a fourth category are abuses that occur when governments have enacted discriminatory legislation or policies that favor majority religions and disadvantage minority religions. This often results from historical dominance by the majority religion and a bias against new or minority religions. In a number of these countries, governments have acted on a widely held ideology that links national identity with a particular religion by enacting legislation that favors the majority religion and discriminates against minority religions. Though the majority of the population in such a country may worship without harassment, such a situation cannot be characterized as true freedom to choose one's faith and worship freely. Furthermore, government backing of a religion can result in restrictions even on worshippers in the majority when the state enforces only one interpretation of that religion.

Finally, the practice of discriminating against certain religions by identifying them as dangerous cults or sects is a common type of abuse, even in countries where religious freedom is otherwise respected. For example, this report discusses denunciations against Shi'ite Muslims in Sunni-majority countries, and vice versa, especially where governments have taken it upon themselves to regulate religious belief and practice according to one of these faith traditions.

Between July 1, 2005, and June 30, 2006, the period covered by this report, wide ranging events had implications for religious freedom. One trend was a significant increase in international media attention to religious freedom issues and controversies. Such events included an international backlash in February 2006 against the republication of a series of twelve cartoons depicting satirical images of Mohammed, originally published in September 2005 by the Danish newspaper Jyllands-Posten. In choosing to publish them, the European media cited freedom of expression. However, many observers, especially in Europe's minority Muslim communities, interpreted this as a direct attack on or demonstration of intolerance toward the Islamic faith.

The remainder of this Executive Summary consists of two parts. Part I summarizes, on a country-by-country basis, actions the U.S. government has taken to advance international religious freedom in the nations designated "Countries of Particular Concern" for particularly severe violations of religious freedom. Part II provides a summary of conditions in those countries where religious freedom is of significant interest, including in Countries of Particular Concern. For each country, this section notes the legal situation and relevant policies, and gives examples of particular government abuses or positive steps governments have taken to promote or protect religious freedom. In most cases, these countries exhibit one or more of the abuses outlined above.

PART I: U.S. ACTIONS IN COUNTRIES OF PARTICULAR CONCERN

The International Religious Freedom Act of 1998 (IRF Act) requires an annual review of the status of religious freedom worldwide and the designation of countries that have "engaged in or tolerated particularly severe violations of religious freedom" during the reporting period as "Countries of Particular Concern" (CPCs). Following the designation, a period of negotiation may ensue, in which the United States seeks to work with a designated country to bring about change. Subsequently, depending upon the results of these discussions, one or more actions are chosen by the secretary of state, as required by the IRF Act. These actions range from sanctions to an agreement to a waiver. In countries where U.S. sanctions are currently in force, the secretary may designate one or more of these sanctions jointly to fulfill the requirements of the IRF Act and other U.S. law. The ambassador at large for international religious freedom and his office take actions to promote religious freedom in each CPC throughout the year. This section highlights actions by other U.S. government officials to promote religious freedom and to encourage the governments to take positive steps to increase religious freedom. In November 2005, the secretary re-designated Burma, China, North Korea, Iran, Sudan, Eritrea, Saudi Arabia, and Vietnam as CPCs. Further details on U.S. actions in CPCs and other countries may be found in each individual country report.

Burma

Every year since 1999, the secretary of state has designated Burma as a CPC. In 2005 the secretary continued the designation of a sanction, consisting of a prohibition on exports or other transfers of defense articles and defense services pursuant to the Arms Export Control Act, as the action under the IRF Act. The U.S. government has a wide array of financial and trade sanctions in place against Burma for its violations of human rights. The U.S. government advocated religious freedom with all facets of society, including with government officials, religious leaders, private citizens, and scholars, foreign diplomats, and international business and media representatives. Through outreach and travel, when not blocked by regime officials, embassy representatives offered support to and exchanged information with many otherwise isolated local nongovernmental organizations and religious leaders.

China

The secretary of state has designated the People's Republic of China a CPC every year since 1999. In 2005, the secretary continued the designation of a sanction, consisting of the restriction of exports of crime control and detection instruments and equipment pursuant to the Foreign Relations Authorization Act, as the action under the IRF Act. The U.S. Department of State, the U.S. Embassy in Beijing, and the Consulates General in Chengdu, Guangzhou, Shanghai, and Shenyang made a concerted effort to encourage greater religious freedom in China, condemning abuses while supporting positive trends. In public and in private, U.S. officials repeatedly urged the PRC Government to respect citizens' constitutional and internationally recognized rights to exercise religious freedom and to release all those serving prison sentences for religious activities. President Bush regularly raised religious freedom in his meetings with Government leaders, including in his April 2006 and November and September 2005 meetings with President Hu Jintao. Assistant Secretary for Democracy, Human Rights and Labor Barry Lowenkron held talks on religious freedom during a February 2006 visit to Beijing. The U.S. ambassador to China highlighted problems of religious freedom and cases of individual religious prisoners of conscience in his public speeches and in his private diplomacy with Chinese officials.

Eritrea

The secretary of state first designated Eritrea as a CPC in 2004. As the action under the IRF Act, in 2005 the secretary of state ordered the denial of commercial export to Eritrea of any defense articles and services controlled under the Arms Export Control Act, excluding certain items such as those used for peacekeeping and anti-terrorism efforts. U.S. embassy officials meet regularly with leaders of the religious community. The U.S. ambassador and other embassy officers have raised the cases of detention and restrictions on unregistered religious groups with officials in the President's Office, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Ministry of Justice, and the leaders of the sole legal political party, the People's Front for Democracy and Justice.

Iran

Every year since 1999, the secretary of state has designated Iran as a CPC. In 2005, the secretary continued the designation of a sanction, consisting of restrictions on U.S. security assistance pursuant to the Arms Export Control Act, as the action under the IRF Act. The United States has no diplomatic relations with Iran, and thus it cannot raise directly the restrictions that the Iranian government places on religious freedom and other abuses the government commits against adherents of minority religious groups. The U.S. government has expressed strongly its objections to the government's harsh and oppressive treatment of religious minorities through public statements, support for relevant U.N. and nongovernmental organization (NGO) efforts, and diplomatic initiatives towards states concerned about religious freedom in Iran. The United States calls on other countries with bilateral relations with Iran to use those ties to press Iran on religious freedoms and human rights. For example, at the fall 2005 session of the Third Committee of the U.N. General Assembly, the United States co-sponsored a successful resolution against Iran, which specifically addressed religious freedom issues among other violations of human rights and fundamental freedoms. The United States has publicly condemned the treatment of the Baha'is in UN resolutions. On numerous occasions, the U.S. State Department has addressed publicly the situation of the Baha'i and Jewish communities in the country, and the U.S. government has encouraged other governments to make similar statements.

North Korea

Every year since 2001, the secretary of state has designated the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) as a CPC. In 2005, the secretary continued the designation of a sanction, consisting of restrictions on normal trade relations and other trade benefits pursuant to the Trade Act of 1974 and the Jackson-Vanik Amendment, as the action under the IRF Act. The U.S. government does not have diplomatic relations with the DPRK, and raises its concerns about the deplorable state of human rights in the country with other countries and in multilateral fora. For example, the U.S. cosponsored a successful resolution that addressed restrictions on religious freedom at the U.N. General Assembly in fall 2005. Assistant Secretary of State for East Asian and Pacific Affairs Christopher Hill has publicly stated that

dialogue on the DPRK's human rights record will be a part of any future normalization process between the DPRK and the United States. In April 2005, several State Department officials testified before the House International Relations Committee on the DPRK's human rights record and U.S. government efforts to implement the 2004 North Korean Human Rights Act (NKHRA). They and the U.S. ambassador at large for international religious freedom have repeatedly raised awareness of the deplorable human rights conditions in the DPRK through speeches before U.S. audiences. In August 2005, the president appointed Jay Lefkowitz as Special Envoy for Human Rights in North Korea, in keeping with one provision of the NKHRA. Since his appointment, Special Envoy Lefkowitz has urged other countries, including the Republic of Korea and Japan, to join the growing international campaign urging the DPRK to address its human rights conditions and abuses of religious freedom. Also in 2005, the U.S. Department of State provided a grant of \$496,000 to the National Endowment for Democracy to improve and expand monitoring and reporting on human rights conditions in the DPRK, as well as a grant to Freedom House for a series of conferences and other activities dedicated to urging the regime to end its abuses. Radio Free Asia and Voice of America also provide regular Korean-language broadcasting. U.S. government policy allows U.S. citizens to travel to the country, and a number of churches and religious groups have organized efforts to alleviate suffering caused by shortages of food and medicine.

Saudi Arabia

The secretary of state first designated Saudi Arabia as a CPC in 2004. Senior U.S. officials and embassy officers met with senior Saudi government and religious leaders regarding religious freedom, and the U.S. ambassador also raised specific cases of violations with senior officials. U.S. government officials also met with the Saudi Government to raise their concerns over the dissemination of intolerant literature and an extremist ideology, and discussed the need for the Saudi Government to honor consistently its public commitment to permit private religious worship by non-Muslims, eliminate discrimination against minorities, promote tolerance toward non-Muslims, and respect the rights of Muslims who do not follow the conservative Hanbali tradition of Sunni Islam. These discussions made it possible to identify and confirm a number of key policies that the Government is pursuing and will continue to pursue for the purposes of promoting greater freedom for religious practice and increased tolerance for religious groups. These include policies designed to halt the dissemination of intolerant literature and extremist ideology, both within Saudi Arabia and around the world, to protect the right to private worship, and to curb harassment of religious practice. For example, the Saudi Government is conducting a comprehensive revision of textbooks and educational curricula to weed out disparaging remarks toward religious groups, a process that will take one to two more years. The Saudi Government is also retraining teachers and the religious police to ensure that the rights of Muslims and non-Muslims are protected and to promote tolerance and combat extremism. The Saudi Government has also created a Human Rights Commission to address the full range of human rights complaints. In view of these developments, the secretary issued a waiver of sanctions "to further the purposes of the Act."

Sudan

Every year since 1999, the secretary of state has designated Sudan a CPC. Among the numerous U.S. sanctions against Sudan, in 2005 the secretary continued the designation of one sanction consisting of the use of the voice and vote of the U.S. to abstain on or oppose loans or other uses of the funds of the international financial institutions to or for Sudan, pursuant to the International Financial Institutions Act, as the action under the IRF Act. The U.S. government encouraged the Government of National Unity (GNU) to fulfill the promises of religious freedom made in the Comprehensive Peace Agreement and the Interim National Constitution, and made clear that restrictions on religious freedom impede improved relations between the United States and Sudan. Deputy Secretary of State Robert Zoellick hosted an interfaith forum with Christian and Muslim leaders in Khartoum during his November 2005 visit. Embassy officials frequently met with leaders of different religious groups. The U.S. embassy has developed working relationships with a number of Muslim and Christian leaders, and U.S. officials met on a regular basis with such leaders in Khartoum, Juba, and on trips outside the capital.

Vietnam

During the period covered by this report, significant improvements occurred in the status of religious freedom in Vietnam (see Part II). First designated a CPC in 2004, the United States and Vietnam worked closely together in the months that ensued, resulting in an exchange of letters in May 2005 that covered the following issues: full implementation of the new laws on religious activities; instruction of local authorities to strictly and completely adhere to the new legislation and ensure their compliance; facilitation of the process by which religious congregations are able to open houses of worship; and special consideration to prisoners and cases of concern raised by the United States during the granting of prisoner amnesties. This exchange of letters mitigated other actions under the IRF Act. The U.S. Embassy in Hanoi and the U.S. Consulate General in Ho Chi Minh City maintain an active and regular dialogue with senior and working-level government officials to advocate greater religious freedom. U.S. officials also meet and communicate regularly with religious leaders of the Buddhist, Catholic, Protestant, Cao Dai, Hoa Hao, and Muslim communities, including religious activists under government scrutiny. When traveling outside of Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City, embassy and consulate general officers regularly met with provincial Religious Affairs Committees, village elders, local clergy, and believers. The U.S. ambassador and other U.S. officials, including the ambassador at large for international religious freedom, raised concerns about the registration and recognition difficulties faced by religious organizations; the detention and arrest of religious figures; the difficulties Protestants face in the Central Highlands and northern Vietnam, including the Northwest Highlands; and other restrictions on religious freedom with the prime minister, deputy prime minister, government cabinet ministers, Communist Party of Vietnam (CPV) leaders, provincial officials, and others. The ambassador at large for international religious freedom and his staff traveled to various regions of the country on six occasions between 2003 and 2006 to meet religious leaders and government authorities. The U.S. government has regularly worked for the release of prisoners deemed to be detained primarily for religious reasons. The Government during the period covered by this report freed four individuals viewed by various sources as having been imprisoned in connection with religious activities.

PART II: COUNTRY-SPECIFIC CONDITIONS OF INTERNATIONAL RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

This section provides a summary of conditions in a number of countries where religious freedom is of significant interest. For each country, this section notes the legal situation and relevant policies, and gives examples of particular government abuses or positive steps governments have taken in the reporting period to promote or protect religious freedom.

Afghanistan

The Afghan constitution states that "followers of other religions are free to exercise their faith and perform their religious rites within the limits of the provisions of law." However, it also states that Islam is the "religion of the state" and that "no law can be contrary to the beliefs and provisions of the sacred religion of Islam." While the government generally respected the right to religious freedom, decades of war and years of Taliban rule and weak democratic institutions, including an unreformed judiciary, have contributed to a conservative culture of intolerance, which at times manifested in acts of harassment and violence against reform-minded Muslims and religious minorities. Widespread condemnations that arose during a case of conversion, and a case of censorship, increased concerns about the ability of Afghans to freely practice their religion. Due to societal pressure, some minority religious believers hide their religion and the Afghan Sikh and Hindu populations faced a number of problems. Relations among the different sects of Islam in the country continued to be difficult. Historically, the minority Shi'a have faced discrimination from the majority Sunni population. Despite these problems, the Government took some positive steps during the reporting period to increase religious freedom. The Ministries of Women's Affairs and Religious Affairs worked together to provide women with greater access to mosques. The Government also responded positively to international approaches on religious freedom and worked effectively on high-profile legal cases such as the blasphemy charges against journalist Mohaqeq Nasab and the apostasy charges against Christian convert Abdul Rahman.

Brunei

Despite constitutional provisions providing for the full and unconstrained exercise of religious freedom, the Government of Brunei used a range of laws to restrict the expansion of religions other than official Islam. Brunei's various religious groups coexist peacefully, but ecumenical interaction is hampered by the dominant Islamic religious ethos, which discourages Muslims from learning about other faiths and forbids persons of other faiths from proselytizing. At the same time, Islamic authorities organize a range of activities to explain and propagate Islam, and they also offer financial incentives, housing, and new mosques for converts to Islam.

Burma

The Burmese Government's repressive, authoritarian military regime imposed restrictions on certain religious activities and frequently committed abuses of the right to freedom of religion. Most adherents of registered religions were permitted to worship as they chose, but the Government continued to infiltrate and monitor activities of virtually all organizations, including religious organizations. It also systematically restricted efforts by Buddhist clergy to promote human rights and political freedom. The Government actively promoted Theravada Buddhism, particularly among minority ethnic groups, and adherence to Buddhism remains generally a prerequisite for promotion to senior government and military ranks. Anti-Muslim violence continued, as did the close monitoring of Muslims' activities. Restrictions on worship of other non-Buddhist minority groups also continued throughout the country.

China

The Chinese constitution provides for freedom of religious belief; however, the Government's respect for freedom of religion and freedom of conscience remained poor. There was little evidence that new regulations on religious affairs, which took effect in 2005, improved the situation of religious freedom; they continued to define only government-approved practices and faiths as normal or legitimate. In most areas of the country, religious believers could worship without difficulty in officially approved venues. However, in some areas there were significant restrictions. Officials in the Xinjiang Uighur Autonomous Region tightly controlled religious activity. In one case in August 2005, Uighur teacher Aminan Momixi and 30 students were detained after Momixi held Qur'an study sessions in her home during summer vacation. In apparent retaliation for the international human rights and religious freedom activism of Uighur Muslim Rebiya Kadeer, the Chinese Government detained and reportedly abused her three adult sons, charging them with financial crimes related to her business ventures in Xinjiang. Followers of Tibetan Buddhism, including in the Inner Mongolian Autonomous Region and Tibetan areas of China, faced restrictions on their religious practice and ability to organize. Repression of unregistered Protestant church networks and "house" churches continued to be widely reported. House church leaders sometimes faced detention, formal arrest and sentences of reeducation or imprisonment. Government officials continued to scrutinize closely contacts between citizens and foreigners involved in religion, detaining some citizens for providing religious information to foreigners and preventing some religious figures from traveling abroad, including church historian Zhang Yinan, whom authorities placed under house arrest and refused to issue a passport. In June 2006, Henan Province Christian pastor Zhang Rongliang, was sentenced to seven and a half years in prison for obtaining a passport through fraud and illegal border crossing. "Underground" Catholic bishops also faced repression, in large part due to their loyalty to the Vatican, which the Government accused of interfering in China's internal affairs. The Government showed some signs of willingness to improve relations with the Vatican after the appointment of Pope Benedict XVI but Beijing and the Vatican clashed in April 2006 over control of the process of ordaining bishops. The Government continued its repression of groups that it categorized as "cults" in general and of small Christian-based groups and the Falun Gong in particular. In June 2006 Pastor Xu Shuangfu and five other members of the "Three Grades of Servants" church, which China considers a cult, were sentenced to death in a murder case involving conflict between the church and the Eastern Lightning group, which China also considers a cult. Scores of Three Grades of Servants church members were tried during the period covered by this report. Falun Gong practitioners continued to face arrest, detention, and imprisonment, and there have been credible reports of deaths due to torture and abuse. Practitioners who refuse to recant their beliefs are sometimes subjected to harsh treatment in prisons, and reeducation through labor camps and extra-judicial "legal education" centers.

Cuba

The Cuban constitution recognizes the right of citizens to profess and practice any religious belief within the framework of respect for the law; however, in law and in practice the Government continued to place restrictions on freedom of religion.

Some religious figures who criticized the Cuban Government's totalitarian system in sermons were subjected to intense harassment. In general, unregistered religious groups continued to experience varying degrees of official interference, harassment, and repression. The Government maintained its policy of permitting apolitical religious activity to take place in government-approved sites. However, citizens worshipping in officially sanctioned churches were subject to surveillance by state security forces, and the Government's efforts to maintain a strong degree of control over religion continued. The Cuban Government implemented new regulations that restricted the operation of house churches but eased its policy on issuing work permits to foreign Catholic clergy.

Egypt

The Egyptian constitution provides for freedom of belief and the practice of religious rites, although the Government places restrictions on these rights in practice. Religious practices that conflict with the Government's interpretation of Shari'a, or Islamic law, are prohibited. Members of the non-Muslim religious minorities officially recognized by the Egyptian Government generally worship without harassment; however, tradition and some aspects of the law discriminated against religious minorities, including Christians and particularly Baha'is, which are not recognized legally. The Government continued to deny civil documents, including identity cards, birth certificates, and marriage licenses, to members of the Baha'i community, which numbers 500 to 2,000 persons. It appealed an April 4 decision by the administrative court, that supported the right of Baha'i citizens to receive ID cards and birth certificates with religion noted on the documents. Many churches continued to encounter difficulty with obtaining permits for church repair and rebuilding, despite a presidential decree in December 2005 stating that such permits, previously requiring his approval, could be granted by provincial governors. In the past, the Government did not provide a legal means for converts from Islam to Christianity to amend their civil records to reflect their new religious status. Over the past two years, approximately thirty-two Muslims who had converted from Christianity have been issued verdicts allowing them to recover their original Christian identities. Metwalli Ibrahim Metwalli Saleh, arrested by the State Security Intelligence Service (SSIS) in May 2003, apparently for his views on Islam, including support of the right to convert, was released on April 23 after receiving eight separate rulings from the Supreme State Security Emergency Court in his favor and an official statement from the state security prosecutor ordering his release.

Eritrea

Religious freedom did not improve overall, and in some areas deteriorated further. The Eritrean Government severely restricts freedom of religion for groups that it has not registered, and infringes upon the independence of some registered groups. Following a 2002 decree that religious groups must register, the Government closed all religious facilities not belonging to the country's four principal religious institutions: the Eritrean Orthodox Church, the Roman Catholic Church, the Evangelical (Lutheran) Church of Eritrea, and Islam. The Government continued to harass, arrest, and detain members of independent Evangelical groups (including Pentecostals), Jehovah's Witnesses, and a reform movement within the Eritrean Orthodox Church. The Government also intervened in procedural and administrative decisions of the Eritrean Orthodox Church by displacing the patriarch in favor of its own candidate. The Government failed to register any of the four religious groups who applied in 2002 for registration, and it restricted religious meetings and arrested individuals during religious ceremonies, gatherings, and prayer meetings. There were also reports of forced recantations. Some religious detainees were held in harsh conditions that included extreme temperature fluctuations with limited or no access to family.

India

The Indian constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally respects this right in practice. While the national government took positive steps in key areas to improve religious freedom, the status of religious freedom generally remained the same during the period covered by this report. The United Progressive Alliance government continued to implement a platform based on respect for secular government and religious tolerance. The vast majority of Indians of every religious faith lived in peaceful coexistence. However, some extremists continued to perceive ineffective prosecution of attacks on religious minorities, particularly at the state and local level, as a signal that they could commit such violence with impunity. Religious conversion remained a highly contentious issue and terrorists continued deadly violence against religious targets. The national government reacted in a swift manner to rein in Hindu extremists, prevent revenge attacks and reprisal, and assure the Muslim community of its safety. In March 2006, the Government of Rajasthan passed an anti-conversion bill, but it had not been approved by the governor by the end of the period covered by this report, and awaited presidential review. In August 2005, the Nanavati commission, tasked with conducting a re-inquiry into the anti-Sikh riots of 1984, released its report, citing several prominent Congress Party leaders for complicity in the violence, implicating law enforcement personnel in the deaths, and setting up committees to dispense compensation for victims' families. In response to a supreme court mandate, in February 2006, the Gujarat police stated that it would reinvestigate 1600 of the approximately 2000 cases that were filed and closed in 2002.

Iran

There was a further deterioration of the extremely poor status of respect for religious freedom during the reporting period. Government actions and rhetoric created a threatening atmosphere for nearly all who do not practice Ja'fari (Twelver) Shi'a Islam. Government-controlled media, including broadcasting and print, intensified negative campaigns against religious minorities, particularly the Baha'is, following the June 2005 election of President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad. There were reports of imprisonment, harassment, intimidation, and discrimination based on religious beliefs. Zoroastrians, Jews, and Christians are the only legally recognized religious minorities; however, even members of these groups have reported imprisonment, harassment, intimidation, and discrimination based on their religious beliefs. On November 22, 2005, unidentified persons killed a man who had converted to Christianity more than 10 years earlier. Reportedly, his death was followed by repression of and threats to other Christians, including arrests of 10 Christians. The Iranian Government regards the Baha'i faith as a heretical Islamic group with a political orientation that is antagonistic to the country's Islamic revolution, and continued to prohibit Baha'is from teaching and practicing their faith. (Baha'is view themselves not as Muslims, but as an independent religion with origins in the Shi'a Islamic tradition.) Government restrictions on Sufi Muslim groups and houses of worship also became more pronounced during the year covered by this report, and Sufis reported the constant harassment and intimidation of prominent Sufi leaders by the intelligence and security services. Although laws governing Sufi practice are ambiguous, there are reports that the Government called for a full ban on the practice of Sufism.

Israel and Occupied Territories

Israeli law provides for freedom of worship, and the Israeli Government generally respects this right. In response to terrorist attacks in the Occupied Territories, Israel's strict closure policies frequently had the effect of restricting the ability of Palestinians to reach places of worship and practice their religions. The violence that has persisted since the beginning of the second Intifada, or uprising, in 2000 has significantly curtailed religious practice in many areas of the Occupied Territories and caused damage to places of worship and religious shrines there. The construction of a separation barrier by the Government of Israel also limited access to sacred sites, and seriously impeded the work of religious organizations that provide humanitarian relief and social services to Palestinians. Such impediments were not exclusive to religious believers or to religious organizations, and at times the Government made efforts to lessen the impact on religious communities. The Government of Israel confiscated land (usually offering limited compensation, which churches did not accept) belonging to several religious institutions to build the barrier. Mahmoud Abbas, president of the Palestinian Authority (PA), took steps to eliminate religious incitement, although incidents of such incitement still occurred. The Basic Law approved by the PA states that the principles of Shari'a (Islamic law) are "the main source of legislation." The strong correlation

between religion, ethnicity, and politics in the Occupied Territories at times imbues the Israeli-Palestinian conflict with a religious dimension. Rhetoric by Palestinian terrorist groups included expressions of anti-Semitism. Some Muslim religious leaders preached sermons on the official PA television station that also included expressions of anti-Semitism. However, on October 28, 2005, Israeli media quoted PLO Chief Negotiator Sa'eb Erekat's statement that the Iranian president's declaration that Israel should be wiped off the map was "unacceptable." In the midst of growing chaos and lawlessness in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, there were credible reports in previous years that PA security forces and judicial officials colluded with members of gangs to seize land from Christians. While there were no reports of Christians being targeted for extortion or abuse during the period covered by this report, the PA did not take action to investigate past injustices allegedly perpetrated by PA officials. Within Israel, problems continued to exist stemming primarily from the unequal treatment of religious minorities, and from the state's recognition of only Orthodox Jewish religious authorities in personal and some civil status matters concerning Jews. Relations among religious groups – between Jews and non-Jews, Muslims and Christians, secular and religious Jews, and among the different streams of Judaism – often were strained, and institutional, legal, and societal discrimination persisted against the country's Arab citizens.

Laos

In some areas, authorities continued to display intolerance for minority religious practice, especially by evangelical Christians. Christians were detained and arrested, or told to renounce their faith on threat of arrest or forceful eviction from their villages. In early 2006, a village chief in Oudomsai Province confiscated the land of several Christian families. A Christian in Salavan Province has been under house arrest since April 1, 2006, for refusing to renounce his faith. A group of displaced ethnic Hmong minors, sent over the border by Thai authorities, has been detained in Bolikhamsai Province since December 2005; some sources indicated that the Hmong were Christians and may have been detained in Laos in part due to their religious affiliation. Also in late 2005, village officials burned a Lao Evangelical Church (LEC) in Bokeo Province and six church leaders were arrested; five of the six were later released, but the other died after being transferred from jail to a military hospital. Conflicts between ethnic groups sometimes exacerbated religious tensions.

North Korea

Although the constitution provides for "freedom of religious belief," genuine religious freedom does not exist, and there was no change in the extremely poor level of respect for religious freedom during the reporting period. The Government severely restricts religious freedom, including organized religious activity, except that which is supervised tightly by officially recognized groups linked to the Government. Some foreigners who have visited the country stated that church services appeared staged and contained political content supportive of the regime. Outsiders have limited ability to ascertain the level of government control over these groups, but it is generally assumed they are monitored closely. Defector reports continued to allege that they witnessed the arrests and execution of members of underground Christian churches by the regime in prior years. There is no reliable information on the number of religious detainees or prisoners, but there are unconfirmed reports that many people are detained for their religious beliefs and activities. Prison conditions are harsh; starvation and forced labor are common.

Pakistan

The country is an Islamic Republic. Islam is the state religion and the constitution requires that laws be consistent with it. The Government took some steps to improve the treatment of religious minorities during the period covered by this report, but serious problems remained. Discriminatory legislation and the Government's failure to take action against societal forces hostile to those who practice a different faith fostered religious intolerance and acts of violence and intimidation against religious minorities. The Ahmadiyya community continued to face legal bars to the practice of its faith. Anti-blasphemy laws provide the death penalty for defiling Islam or its prophets; life imprisonment for defiling, damaging, or desecrating the Qur'an; and 10 years' imprisonment for insulting the religious feelings of any citizen. These laws are often used to intimidate reform-minded Muslims, sectarian opponents and religious minorities, or to settle personal scores. "Hudood Ordinances" impose elements of Qur'anic law on both

Muslims and non-Muslims and different legal standards for men and women. Religious leaders, representing the country's six major Shi'a and Sunni groups, issued a religious injunction in May 2005 banning sectarian violence and the killing of non-Muslims. However, except for the Federally Administered Northern Areas, the sectarian violence situation remained unchanged, which led to more than 110 deaths during the reporting period. Under government pressure, many of the leaders of Muttahida Majlis-i-Amal, a coalition of Islamist political parties that leads the opposition in the national assembly, joined various interfaith efforts to promote religious tolerance. Anti-Ahmadi and anti-Semitic rhetoric continued unabated, although rhetoric against Ismaili followers of the Aga Khan was largely abandoned. The Government worked with moderate religious leaders to organize programs on sectarian harmony and inter-faith understanding, maintained its ban on and actively attempted to curb the activities of sectarian and terrorist organizations, implemented a registration program for Islamic religious schools known as madrassahs, and continued with reform of the public education curriculum designed to end the teaching of religious intolerance. On July 1, 2006, President Musharraf instructed the Council on Islamic Ideology (CII) to prepare a revised Hudood Ordinance that eliminates discriminatory treatment of women and minorities not later than August 2006. In addition, the president ordered the release of all women detained under the current ordinance; according to local NGOs, approximately 700 women have been released.

Russia

The practice of religion was generally free for a significant majority of the population. However, some federal officials have taken actions that raise concerns about the Russian Government's consistency and vigilance in protecting religious freedom. In addition, some local and regional authorities have relied on provisions of the complex 1997 Law on Religion to restrict several minority religious groups. A 2004 court decision banning Jehovah's Witnesses in Moscow continued to have significant negative ramifications for the activities of Jehovah's Witnesses during the reporting period. There were indications that the security services, including the Federal Security Service (FSB), increasingly treated the leadership of some minority religious groups as security threats. Popular attitudes toward traditionally Muslim ethnic groups are negative in many regions, and there are manifestations of anti-Semitism as well as hostility toward Roman Catholics and other non-Orthodox Christian denominations. Some observant Muslims claimed harassment because of their faith. Instances of religiously motivated violence continued, although it often was difficult to determine whether xenophobic, religious, or ethnic prejudices were the primary motivation behind violent attacks. Some Russian Orthodox Church clergy have stated publicly their opposition to any expansion of the presence of Roman Catholics, Protestants, and other non-Orthodox denominations. The Russian president and Government reacted quickly in condemning a January 2006 attack on a Moscow synagogue.

Saudi Arabia

Islam is the official religion, and the law requires that all citizens be Muslims. The Government does not provide legal recognition or protection for freedom of religion, and it is severely restricted in practice. The public practice of non-Muslim religions is prohibited. As a matter of policy, the Government confirmed that it guarantees and protects the right to private worship for all, including non-Muslims who gather in homes for religious practice; however, this right is not always respected in practice and is not defined in law. During the reporting period, the Government identified and confirmed its policies with regard to religious practice and tolerance in a number of key areas. The Government continued a campaign against religious extremism, and top officials, including the king, continued to call for the promotion of tolerance. There were reports that some imams in their Friday sermons called for all citizens to show respect for other religious faiths, but denunciations from government-sanctioned pulpits of non-Muslim religions and the Shi'a branch of Islam were also reported. The Government enforces a strictly conservative interpretation of Sunni Islam, and Muslims who do not adhere to it can face significant societal discrimination and serious repercussions at the hands of mutawwa'in (religious police, officially known as the Commission to Promote Virtue and Prevent Vice). Reports of harassment of non-Muslims and non-Sunni Muslims by mutawwa'in continued, including raids of private residences and detentions of non-Muslims for religious violations, such as possession of non-Muslim literature or holding non-Muslim worship services; however, there were fewer reports than last year. Anecdotal evidence suggests that there was a

decrease in both long-term and short-term detentions, and in arrests and deportations, of non-Muslims. However, there were also reports that mutawwa'in targeted several non-Muslim religious leaders and active members of non-Muslim religious groups for arrest and deportation. Many non-Muslims continued to worship in fear of harassment and in such a manner as to avoid discovery by police or mutawwa'in. Members of the Shi'a minority continued to face political, economic, legal, social, and religious discrimination, including discrimination in employment, little representation in official institutions, and restrictions on the practice of their faith and on the building of mosques and community centers. However, the Government made efforts to improve the climate of tolerance toward other religions and within Islam. In December 2005, King Abdullah hosted a ministerial summit of the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC), inaugurating it with a call for moderation, tolerance, rejection of extremist violence, and reform of educational programs (including textbooks and curricula). The Government clarified that it will continue to revise educational materials to remove disparaging references to other religious traditions, and to retrain or remove imams whose preaching promotes extremist religious thought.

Sri Lanka

The constitution accords Buddhism the "foremost place," but it is not recognized as the state religion. While the Government publicly endorses the right of members of other faiths to freely practice their religion, in practice, there were problems in some areas. Anti-conversion legislation first introduced in 2004 remained under consideration. Despite generally amicable relations among persons of different faiths, there has been ongoing violent resistance by some Buddhists to Christian church activity, in particular that conducted by evangelical groups. There were sporadic attacks on Christian churches by Buddhist extremists and some societal tension due to ongoing allegations of forced conversions and debate on anti-conversion legislation.

Sudan

The 2005 Interim National Constitution provides for freedom of religion throughout the entire country, and there was some improvement in the status of respect for religious freedom in the period covered by this report. However, regional distinctions in the constitution, negotiated as part of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA), have resulted in disparities in the treatment of religious minorities in the North and the South. The Interim National Constitution preserved Shari'a as a source of legislation in states outside southern Sudan, but recognized "popular consensus" and "the values and the customs of the people of Sudan, including their traditions and religious beliefs", as sources of legislation in the South. The Government of Southern Sudan generally respected the rights of Christians and Muslims in the ten states of the south as provided for in its separate interim constitution, signed on December 5, 2005, but the new Government of National Unity (GNU) continued to place restrictions on Christians in the North, particularly by denying building permits for new churches. The national government required that all students in the North study Islam in school, regardless of whether they were Muslim, and even if enrolled in private, Christian schools. The Interim National Constitution calls for the establishment of a Commission for the Rights of Non-Muslims in the capital, Khartoum, to ensure that non-Muslims are not adversely affected by the application of Shari'a law there, but that had not taken place by the end of the period covered by this report. Relations among religious groups improved during the reporting period. Dialogue between Christian and Muslim groups continued under the auspices of the Sudan Inter-Religious Council (SIRC), a nongovernmental organization supported by the Government of National Unity, and the Sudan Council of Churches (SCC), comprising Catholic, Orthodox, and Protestant groups. The SIRC supported peace and reconciliation efforts between Christians and Muslims, sponsoring a conference on the role of religious leaders in peace building with the U.S. Institute of Peace in July 2005.

Turkmenistan

The constitution provides for freedom of religion and does not establish a state religion, but in practice the Government continued to monitor all forms of religious expression. However, the status of government respect for religious freedom improved during the period covered by this report. The Government's Council for Religious Affairs (CRA) was more willing to assist minority religious groups in resolving conflicts with other government agencies. On October 20, 2005, several government agencies hosted a

roundtable discussion with leaders of registered religious groups to discuss registration procedures for branch religious groups and other related concerns. During the reporting period, the Government of Turkmenistan introduced a temporary procedure for registering branches of registered religious groups located outside of the capital, Ashgabat. However, the procedure was not clear and the implementation by government officials was not consistent. The Government of Turkmenistan limited the activities of unregistered religious congregations by prohibiting them from gathering publicly, proselytizing, and disseminating religious materials. Government officials outside the capital often interpreted the law more strictly than those in Ashgabat. Although the level of harassment continued to decrease for registered religious groups, most unregistered groups continued to experience official harassment, including detention, arrest, confiscation of religious literature and materials, pressure to abandon religious beliefs, and threats of eviction and job loss. There were reports of abuse for religious belief or observance, and there were several accounts of persons being detained for questioning in connection with practicing their faith. To better facilitate government control of mosques, the Turkmen Government replaced a number of Sunni Muslim imams with individuals believed to be less independent in their interpretations of Islam.

Uzbekistan

There was a decline in the status of religious freedom during the period covered by this report. The constitution provides for freedom of religion; however, the Government continued to restrict these rights in practice. The Government permits the operation of approved Muslim groups, Jewish groups, the Russian Orthodox Church, and various other Christian denominations, such as Roman Catholics, Lutherans, and Baptists. The law prohibits or severely restricts activities such as proselytizing, importing and disseminating religious literature, and offering private religious instruction. A number of minority religious groups, including congregations of a variety of Christian denominations, had difficulty satisfying the strict registration requirements set out by the law. There were several reports that Christian congregations were denied registration on spurious technical grounds. As in previous years, Protestant groups with ethnic Uzbek members reported operating in a climate of harassment and fear. Law enforcement officials raided and harassed some registered groups, several of which were de-registered and closed. The Government continued its campaign against unauthorized Islamic groups suspected of extremist sentiments or activities, arresting numerous alleged members of these groups and sentencing them to lengthy jail terms. Many of these were suspected members of Hizb ut-Tahrir (HT), a banned extremist Islamic political movement. Many others were conservative Muslims whose beliefs or teachings differed from those of state-sanctioned clerics. The Government pressured the banned Islamic group Akromiya (Akromiylar), especially in Tashkent and Andijon, with those actions spilling over into violence and deaths in Andijon in May 2005. A small but growing number of "underground" mosques operated under the close scrutiny of religious authorities and the security services. Mosques operating without registration are technically illegal and only operate with the indulgence of the local government.

Vietnam

Overall, respect for religious freedom in Vietnam improved during the period covered by this report. Both the constitution and law provide for freedom of worship; however, the Government continued to restrict organized activities of religious groups that it declared to be at variance with State laws and policies. The Government attempts to regulate religious practice through a legal framework, the foundation of which is the 2004 Ordinance on Religion and Belief, which requires that the Government officially sanction the organization and activities of all religious denominations. A number of positive legal reforms adopted in recent years remained in the early stages of implementation. The 2005 implementation decree for the Ordinance delineates established guidelines for religious denominations to register their activities and seek official recognition. The 2005 "Instruction on Protestantism" promulgated by the prime minister directs officials to assist unrecognized Protestant denominations in registering their activities so that they can practice openly. The Instruction also calls on the Vietnamese Government to facilitate gathering for worship during the registration process. Protestant believers in the Central Highlands reported significant improvements in their situation. Furthermore, the Government began to promote registration of Protestant house churches in northern Vietnam and the Northwest Highlands region, but progress was slow and the Vietnamese Government stated that only six previously unregistered northern congregations were allowed to legally register their activities during the reporting period. Despite several confirmed reports of

police harassment and beatings of unregistered believers, Protestants across the north reported improvement in most officials' attitudes towards religious practice, and in general Protestants were allowed to gather for worship without significant harassment. Restrictions on the hierarchies and clergy of some religious groups remained in place, and the Vietnamese Government maintained a prominent role in supervising recognized religions. Religious leaders encountered greatest restrictions when they engaged in activities that the Government perceived as political activism or a challenge to its rule. The Government of Vietnam continued to ban and actively discourage participation in one unrecognized faction of the Hoa Hao Buddhists. The Government also actively restricted the leadership of the unrecognized United Buddhist Church of Vietnam and maintained that it will not recognize this organization under its current leadership. The Catholic Church reported that the Government continued to ease restrictions on church assignment of new clergy but indicated that it would like to open additional seminaries in the North. During the period covered by this report, the Government released four prominent prisoners viewed by various sources as having been imprisoned in connection with religious activities.

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*WPD517 09/15/2006

Text: Introduction to the International Religious Freedom Report
(Freedom of religion is the cornerstone of universal human rights) (1010)

(begin text)

International Religious Freedom Report 2006

Released by the Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor
U.S. Department of State
September 15, 2006

INTRODUCTION

Faith as a personal choice and an essential freedom is a cornerstone of the American character, rooted in the vision of our founding fathers. Freedom of religion has been one of our foremost liberties from the birth of our nation to this day, and the resolve of Americans to champion that freedom – not only at home, but also around the world – has remained steadfast. As Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice has stated, "There is no more fundamental issue for the United States than freedom of religion and religious conscience. This country was founded on that basis, and it is at the heart of democracy."

Religious liberty is America's "first freedom," enshrined in the First Amendment of our Bill of Rights. In the same way, freedom of religion is a cornerstone of universal human rights, for it encompasses freedom of speech, assembly, and conscience, which together form the foundation for democratic governance and respect for the individual. For this reason the growth of democracy we are witnessing today has gone hand in hand with a growth in religious freedom and other human rights. Freedom House, which annually categorizes each nation as "free," "partly free," or "not free" based on a wide range of criteria, including religious freedom, estimated that forty-four countries were "free" in 1972, the first year that it released its country ratings. By last year, that number had risen to eighty-nine countries. The number of "not free" countries, in turn, has fallen from sixty-eight in 1972 to forty-five today.

Yet, while democracy and respect for basic freedoms have gained ground throughout the world, many governments still pay no more than lip service to their responsibilities under the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and other international agreements. In too many countries, governments refuse to

recognize and protect religious freedom. A number of governments actively work against this foundational right. And in some nations today, violent extremists, exploiting religion in the service of an ideology of intolerance and hate, direct their attacks against those who seek only to worship according to the dictates of their conscience. Even as we stand together with those who rightly demand religious freedom, we stand firmly against those who, whether acting on behalf of governments or on behalf of organizations that manipulate faith for violent purposes, impede human liberty and democracy.

The Annual Report on International Religious Freedom was established as a means to help promote and protect this universal right. The report seeks to shed light in those parts of the world where religious persecution is perpetrated, and by that light to impede its progress. The very process underlying the report, of investigating, documenting, and protesting abuses, can help mitigate the violations. That so many endure beatings, torture, and imprisonment, yet remain committed to their beliefs, sometimes even to the point of death, is a testament to the strength and resilience of their faith. The Annual Report on International Religious Freedom testifies to this strength, speaking for the many millions who continue to suffer on the basis of their religious identity, belief, or practice.

This report is a natural outgrowth of our country's history. That which is precious to us, we urge others to protect and preserve as well. Our own record as a nation on this and other freedoms is not perfect. However, our imperfections cannot serve as an excuse to retreat from the challenge of working to make this universal right a reality for all humankind.

As the Ambassador at Large for International Religious Freedom, with responsibility to both the President and the Secretary of State as principal advisor on advancing religious freedom worldwide, it is my mission and that of my office to stand with those who seek and promote religious freedom, and against those who would stifle it. Under my direction, the Office of International Religious Freedom undertakes a wide range of activities aimed at implementing U.S. policy on religious freedom, working closely with colleagues in the Department of State and U.S. embassies overseas in order to bring the full set of diplomatic tools to bear on the issue. Through formal and informal bilateral negotiations with foreign governments, participation in multilateral fora such as the United Nations and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, cooperation with human rights and faith-based NGOs, and meetings with victims of abuse, we develop and carry out strategies to address persecution wherever it is found.

As we present to Congress and the public this eighth edition of the Annual Report on International Religious Freedom, I wish to express my gratitude for the strong and vigilant leadership of President Bush and Secretary of State Rice on this issue, as well as for the bipartisan support which Congress has provided. We all owe a debt of gratitude, as well, to so many who work in non-governmental organizations on behalf of the oppressed.

The good news, as the Freedom House ranking of countries shows, is that together we are making progress. But clearly, enormous challenges remain. "As the United States advances the cause of liberty," President Bush has said, "we remember that freedom is not America's gift to the world, but God's gift to each man and woman in this world. This truth drives our efforts to help people everywhere achieve freedom of religion and establish a better, brighter and more peaceful future for all."

It is to the courageous men, women, and children around the world who suffer because of their faith that we dedicate this annual report. May it provide some measure of encouragement to their aspirations and some hope that their story is not untold, nor their plight forgotten in the press of world affairs.

John V. Hanford III, Ambassador at Large for International Religious Freedom

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State Department Releases 2006 International Religious Freedom Report
(Report reviews countries' commitment to advancing religious freedom) (490)

By Michelle Austein
Washington File Staff Writer

Washington -- The U.S. Department of State released its eighth annual International Religious Freedom Report September 15. The 2006 report examines countries' commitment to advancing religious freedom from July 1, 2005, to June 30, 2006.

The International Religious Freedom Act of 1998 requires an annual review of the status of religious freedom worldwide. The report to Congress documents governments' actions that could be a barrier to religious freedom, including repressing religious expression, persecuting people for their beliefs or tolerating violence against religious minorities. The report also lists governments that respect, protect and promote religious freedom.

In addition, the act requires designating countries that have "engaged in or tolerated particularly severe violations of religious freedom" as a "country of particular concern (CPC)." In November 2005, Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice designated Burma, China, Eritrea, Iran, North Korea, Saudi Arabia, Sudan and Vietnam as CPCs. The 2006 report reviews actions taken by the U.S. government to advance international religious freedom in these countries.

The actions taken by the United States have varied with each CPC, according to the report. For example, the United States has imposed a variety of trade sanctions on Burma while in Eritrea, U.S. officials meet regularly with members of religious communities. State Department leaders have also visited other countries to promote religious freedom. In November 2005, Deputy Secretary of State Robert Zoellick hosted an interfaith forum with Christian and Muslim leaders in Khartoum, Sudan, and Assistant Secretary of State for Democracy, Human Rights and Labor Barry Lowenkron held talks on religious freedom during a February visit to Beijing.

Among the CPCs, Vietnam was cited for improving its overall respect for religious freedom during the 2006 reporting period. In May 2005, Vietnam began making improvements with new laws protecting religious activities.

The 2006 report considers a government broadly repressing peaceful religious expression to be abusive. Additionally, the report states, "countries and situations in which authorities' over-zealous actions taken against observant believers suspected of extremism have had the principal effect of restricting religious freedom. In some countries, for example, many are afraid to attend mosque frequently lest the government characterize them as religious extremists."

The report cites countries that have enacted legislation favoring the majority religion and discriminating against minority religions. "These governments implement policies designed to demand that adherents recant their faith, cause religious group members to flee the country, or intimidate and harass certain religious groups," according to the report. This has happened in some countries in which the government is dominated by a majority ethnic group.

The report also identifies as religious abuse the practice of discriminating against certain religions by describing them as dangerous cults or sects.

The full texts of the 2006 report (<http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/irf/2006/>) and previous reports (<http://www.state.gov/g/drl/irf/rpt/>) are available on the State Department Web site.

For more information, see International Religious Freedom (http://usinfo.state.gov/dhr/human_rights/intl_religious_freedom.html) and Democracy Dialogues' Freedom of Religion (http://www.democracy.gov/dd/eng_democracy_dialogues/religion.html).

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*WPD519 09/15/2006

United States Very Concerned About Death of Turkmen Journalist
(State Department calls on Turkmenistan to provide results of Muradova autopsy) (710)

By Jeffrey Thomas
Washington File Staff Writer

Washington — The United States has expressed concern about the death in a Turkmen prison of Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty (RFE/RL) correspondent Ogulsapar Muradova.

"We are very concerned about the death of a prisoner in the government of Turkmenistan's custody and are working to gather the facts," the State Department spokesman said in a statement issued September 14.

Muradova was arrested June 18, the third RFE/RL Turkmen correspondent to be arrested in 2006. Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty is a private, international communications service to Eastern Europe, the Caucasus, and Central and Southwestern Asia funded by the U.S. Congress through the Broadcasting Board of Governors.

"The exact circumstances of Ms. Muradova's death remain unclear, and we call upon the Government of Turkmenistan to provide the results of the autopsy they conducted," the State Department spokesman said. "We will remain closely engaged through our Mission regarding this situation."

The statement noted that Muradova was serving a six-year sentence for illegal possession of ammunition but added that "the Turkmen judicial system lacks independence, and Ms. Muradova's trial was conducted without due process and behind closed doors."

U.S. Embassy staff in Ashgabat met frequently with the Muradova family during the trial and after her sentencing, according to the statement, which added, "We wish to extend our deepest condolences on their loss."

Chargé d'Affaires ad interim Jennifer Brush plans to attend Muradova's funeral September 15, the State Department said.

The U.S. Broadcasting Board of Governors, an independent federal agency that oversees U.S. international broadcasting including RFE/RL, called for an immediate, thorough and impartial investigation into Muradova's death.

"Mrs. Muradova will be remembered for her courage and dedication to reporting the truth to the people of Turkmenistan," said Kenneth Y. Tomlinson, chairman of the Broadcasting Board of Governors, in remarks reported by RFE/RL.

RFE/RL acting President Jeff Trimble said, "This is a terrible outcome of a long ordeal and a shocking indictment of the Turkmen regime's callous and inhumane treatment of the people it rules. All of us at RFE/RL mourn the untimely loss of a colleague. Our hearts go out to Ogulsapar Muradova's family."

Trimble added, "We will keep her memory alive by carrying on her work, continuing through our broadcasting to bring truth to Turkmen citizens and to be their voice to the outside world."

RFE/RL is reporting that relatives who eventually saw Muradova's body "have been quoted as saying it bore signs of violence." (See article (<http://www.rferl.org/featuresarticle/2006/09/4859b870-88ca-49e1-91f3-603e669343dc.html>) on the RFE/RL Web site for further details.)

The long prison sentences for Muradova and two other Turkmen rights activists drew criticism from Europe's largest governmental human rights organization, the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE).

In a statement issued August 28, Miklos Haraszti, the OSCE representative on freedom of the media, condemned the lack of transparency in the handling of the cases of Annakurban Amanklychev, Sapardurdy Khajiev, and Muradova.

"Turkmenistan did not allow observers to monitor this case. The international community is right to worry that the defendants are in trouble because of their journalistic and human rights activities," Haraszti said.

International human rights groups also condemned the sentences of up to seven years as outrageous.

The International Helsinki Federation for Human Rights (IHF) called on the international community to denounce the sentences "and take further steps to demonstrate that such show trials ending in brutal sentences of human rights defenders and journalists have no place in the OSCE or in the civilized world. If there is business as usual with such a state, then citizens who want to exercise basic rights are not safe anywhere."

On August 25, Paris-based Reporters Without Borders (RWB) expressed disgust at the "absurd, unjust and disgraceful" sentence, and the New York-based Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ) condemned the trial as a "mockery of justice."

The IHF statement (http://www.ihf-hr.org/viewbinary/viewdocument.php?doc_id=6952), the RWB statement (http://www.rsf.org/print.php3?id_article=18660), and the CPJ statement (<http://www.cpj.org/news/2006/europe/turkmen25aug06na.html>) are available on the groups' Web sites. Haraszti's statement (<http://www.osce.org/item/20186.html>) is available on the OSCE Web site.

The most recent Country Report on Human Rights Practices in Turkmenistan (<http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2005/61681.htm>) is available on the State Department Web site.

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*WPD520 09/15/2006

Community Radio Helps Manage Conflict in Mali
(Partnership for a Better Life) (430)

Mali is threatened by regional and tribal conflict, has some religious extremist groups with possible ties to terrorist organizations, and has a large cohort of disaffected youth and ex-combatants stemming from the Northern Peace Accord of 1996.

The nomadic populations of northern Mali remain largely isolated and are often excluded from full participation in decisions that affect their lives. In light of these factors, the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) is establishing and maintaining contact by radio while providing services for the nomadic population. Radio has proven to be the most cost-effective means of delivering vital information on health, nutrition, education, and peace and democracy.

Specifically, through its Conflict Management through Community Radio Program, USAID is establishing 10 FM radio stations that will reach an estimated 385,000 people in Mali's north.

Although a relatively new program, the simple promise of radio service already has helped develop bonds between two communities characterized by long-standing conflict.

USAID identified the town of Tarinkit, with a predominately Touareg population, and the town of Almoustarat, predominately Arab, as possible sites for a radio station. Almoustarat was selected as the most viable location.

This decision caused immediate dismay among leaders of the Touareg and led to debate among the leaders of Almoustarat. USAID made it clear that the two communities had to come to an agreement or the station would be installed in another town.

But everyone wanted the radio service. First, the Touareg met. Then the Touareg and Arabs came together to discuss the issue. The conclusion: citizens and local authorities agreed on Almoustarat as the site.

Members of the two communities were astonished at what they had been able to achieve. It was the first time residents of the district had collaborated on anything. They made decisions that ensured that both communities would benefit from the presence of the radio -- they worked together to build the station, and selected radio staff and a steering committee on which both communities were represented fairly.

The activity and preparations have had a profound impact on conflict management in the area.

"We are very grateful to the "prefect" and his delegation for their mediation efforts in what would have been a useless misunderstanding ... over the radio issue.

"We now feel happy to have been educated on this problem. Our council was elected based on consensus. Therefore, we wish ... all actions to be initiated be based on consensus," said Sidalamine Ag Doho, district council vice president.

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Insecticide DDT Returns to the Anti-Malarial Arsenal
(U.S. malaria prevention initiative will support indoor spraying of DDT) (570)

Washington – The World Health Organization (WHO) announced September 15 new guidelines to promote the indoor use of the pesticide DDT as a means to prevent malaria, a disease that takes more than 1 million lives a year.

Widespread use of DDT was discontinued in the 1960s after it was found that the pesticide was a persistent organic pollutant having great longevity in the environment and causing damage to other life forms. That decision had a public health consequence in malaria endemic areas where local officials were deprived of one of their best tools to control mosquitoes and prevent malaria.

Re-evaluation of the use of the insecticide now reveals that the use of this substance indoors in a controlled manner will better protect people from mosquitoes and the malaria parasites they carry without broadcasting the pesticide in the environment at large.

"Indoor residual spraying (IRS) is useful to quickly reduce the number of infections caused by malaria-carrying mosquitoes, said Dr. Anarfi Asamoah-Bah, WHO's assistant director-general for HIV/AIDS, TB and Malaria. "IRS has proven to be just as cost effective as other malaria prevention measures, and DDT presents no health risk when used properly."

Indoor residual spraying involves spraying the inside walls of a dwelling so that a residue of insecticide remains and offers long-term protection against disease-causing bugs. Studies show that correct and timely use of indoor residual spraying can reduce malaria transmission by up to 90 percent.

"Indoor spraying is like providing a huge mosquito net over an entire household for around-the-clock protection," said U.S. Senator Tom Coburn, a Republican from Oklahoma who is a leading advocate for global malaria control efforts.

Even prior to this WHO decision about DDT use, a number of malaria-ridden nations – India and South Africa among them – had adopted indoor residual spraying with success. The WHO announcement likely will open the door for more nations to adopt this strategy for the prevention of malaria, a disease widely recognized as an impediment to development and advancement because of its disproportionate effect on poor nations. (See related article (<http://usinfo.state.gov/xarchives/display.html?p=washfile-english&y=2006&m=August&x=20060801112833cmretrop0.3886682>).)

"I anticipate that all 15 of the country programs of President Bush's \$1.2 billion commitment to cut malaria deaths in half will include substantial indoor residual spraying activities, including many that will use DDT," said Admiral R. Timothy Ziemer, coordinator of the President's Malaria Initiative. "Because it is relatively inexpensive and very effective, USAID supports the spraying of homes with insecticides as a part of a balanced, comprehensive malaria prevention and treatment program."

President Bush announced the President's Malaria Initiative (PMI) in June 2005. It is a \$1.2 billion, five-year collaboration of several government agencies that attempts to take a comprehensive approach to preventing and treating malaria. The program aims to reduce malaria in Africa by 50 percent by 2010. Seven high-risk African nations currently are targeted, and 15 ultimately will be included. (See related article (<http://usinfo.state.gov/xarchives/display.html?p=washfile-english&y=2006&m=August&x=20060825160531cmretrop0.9974176>).)

The distribution of bed nets to protect families from mosquitoes while sleeping is another low-tech solution in the effort to reduce malaria. More effective medicines also are becoming available to replace older drugs to which the malaria parasites have become resistant.

For ongoing coverage of this issue, see Health (http://usinfo.state.gov/gi/global_issues/health.html).

(Distributed by the Bureau of International Information Programs, U.S. Department of State. Web site: <http://usinfo.state.gov>)

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*WPD522 09/15/2006

Reporters Can Keep News Fresh, Accurate Despite Obstacles

(Online discussion with reporters in Kampala examines role of journalists) (700)

By Carolee Walker

Washington File Staff Writer

Washington -- Journalists must want to change the way their work is perceived to establish credibility with their audience, said veteran journalist Deborah Potter who hosted a State Department-sponsored webchat with participants in Kampala, Uganda, on September 15.

"It would help if journalists would agree on some professional standards and publicize them so the audience can hold them accountable if they fall short," Potter said.

Potter is executive director of NewsLab, an online resource center for journalists she founded in 1998.

Journalists should be fair-minded, Potter said. "They have to be able to put aside their own beliefs and listen to those of others so they can fairly represent them in the media. They have to care, deeply, about accuracy and be willing to check and re-check information to make sure they have it right."

For example, in situations where governments, media owners or sponsors try to influence journalists' news coverage, journalists should recognize that an independent press is a goal, not a given.

"Instead of divorcing themselves from competing interests," Potter said, "journalists need to be aware of them and to ask themselves how they can report every story in an independent way."

It is difficult to maintain the energy and passion for reporting when journalists are so often thwarted, Potter said. "One thing that can keep you fresh is working on a project or story that you care deeply about. You still have to do your daily work, but if you can also do a little bit along the way on a story that matters to you, you can keep the passion alive."

Journalists should seek support from their colleagues because "press freedom is always a moving target," she said. Journalists want more of it, and because it can be difficult to secure, Potter said, journalists are uncomfortable lobbying for legislative change. It is helpful to organize local journalism groups that can take on this task, she suggested.

Some news media organizations in the United States, for example, have devoted one week each year to reporting on freedom of information. (See related article (<http://usinfo.state.gov/journals/itdhr/0800/ijde/schmuhl.htm>).)

Radio is the most economical source of news and information in Uganda, with the widest coverage, but most radio stations allot only a few minutes for news, according to a webchat participant. Potter, who said radio newsrooms are often understaffed everywhere, suggested that to keep news fresh and accurate throughout the day, radio journalists need to collect new information.

"This sounds obvious, but it's amazing how often this basic requirement is ignored," Potter said. "Even if you don't have a staff of reporters you can send into the field during the day, you need a way to get new information on the air. If you can reach people by telephone and record your calls you can get fresh 'sound bites' on the news. At a minimum, radio presenters should be rewriting their newscasts every hour to keep the information fresh," Potter said.

Potter said journalists writing for online media think differently about their stories from the start. "The medium really does change the message," she said. For example, online news consumers are looking for many different things, including interactive elements, graphics, maps, video or slide shows. Reporters do not need to be experts at producing online elements, Potter said, but they need to understand what can be done to enhance their stories.

Online readers are "skimmers," Potter said, cautioning reporters to resist the temptation to write long stories for online use.

Prior to establishing NewsLab, Potter was a network correspondent for CBS News and CNN, covering the White House, State Department, Congress, national politics and environmental issues for more than 20 years.

For more information, see Potter's State Department publication, *The Handbook of Independent Journalism* (<http://usinfo.state.gov/products/pubs/journalism/index.htm>), which covers the basics of how

to research, write and edit a story, compose headlines, choose graphics and select quotes and sound bites.

Additional information on NewsLab (<http://www.newslab.org/>) is available on its Web site.

A transcript (<http://usinfo.state.gov/usinfo/Archive/2006/Sep/15-326531.html>) of Potter's discussion and information on upcoming webchats is available on Webchat Station (<http://usinfo.state.gov/usinfo/Products/Webchats.html>).

(The Washington File is a product of the Bureau of International Information Programs, U.S. Department of State. Web site: <http://usinfo.state.gov>)
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*WPD523 09/15/2006

Transcript: Journalists Discusses Challenges, Pressures in Reporting the News
(USINFO Webchat transcript, September 15) (2100)

Deborah Potter, an executive director of NewsLab (an online resource center for journalists in Washington that she founded in 1998) and a featured columnist, responds to questions in a September 15 USINFO Webchat about the fundamentals of journalism as it is practiced in a democratic system.

Following is the transcript:

(begin transcript)

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF STATE
Bureau of International Information Programs
USINFO Webchat Transcript

Guest: Deborah Potter
Date: September 15, 2006
Time: 9:00 a.m. EDT (1300 GMT)

Deborah Potter and Ugandan Journalists

IIP Moderator: Welcome to our USINFO Webchat with Ms. Deborah Potter. Our webchat will begin in just a few minutes at 9:00 a.m. Washington/4:00 p.m. Kampala time.

We are already receiving your questions. Please submit each question separately.

Deborah Potter: Good day to everyone in Kampala. Thanks for inviting me to discuss journalism issues with you.

Question [Zubedah]: Hello Deborah, what tips can you give on professionalizing broadcast journalism in developing countries, which at the moment is looked at more as a source of entertainment than a provider for credible news and information? - Zubedah

Answer [Deborah Potter]: This is a difficult issue to solve. First, the journalists themselves have to want to change the way their work is perceived. Then they need the support of their managers and, I think, some training. It is difficult to establish or regain credibility with an audience that doesn't expect it. But I think it can be done, over time. It would help if journalists would agree on some professional standards and publicize them so the audience can hold them accountable if they fall short.

Q [Zubedah]: In Uganda, Radio seems to be the cheapest source of news and information and is also said to have the widest coverage in terms of audience. The problem is that most radio stations, which are

mainly commercialised, tend to allocate a maximum of 5 minutes for news which lacks freshness and quality content as the day goes by. In your opinion, how best can radio news be made more interesting without necessarily shortening it? - Zubedah

A: Radio is a terrific medium for reaching a wide audience, but radio newsrooms are often under-staffed. To keep the news fresh and interesting throughout the day, radio journalists have to collect new information. This sounds obvious, but it's amazing how often this basic requirement is ignored. Even if you don't have a staff of reporters you can send into the field during the day, you need a way to get new information on the air. If you can reach people by telephone and record your calls you can get fresh "sound bites" on the news. At a minimum, radio presenters should be rewriting their newscasts every hour to keep the information fresh.

Q [Geoffrey]: Uganda's media enjoy some press freedom. However, the state has intentionally maintained oppressive laws, though applied selectively. Laws like sedition, prohibition of importation of publications, the 1995 press and media statute and lately the terrorism act under which a journalist can be sentenced to death. The media has for the last 20 years of NRM rule not managed to have those laws scrapped.

What is your advice/comment on this?

A: Press freedom is always a moving target. Journalists want more of it, but it's difficult to secure. One problem, I think, is that journalists are either too busy doing their daily jobs or are uncomfortable with the idea of lobbying for legislative change, so they just make do with the current situation. It's helpful to organize local journalism groups that can take on this task. My guess is that government entities don't respond particularly well to being chastised about this by outside groups.

If possible, try to get the public involved in supporting greater press freedom. News media in the United States, for example, have devoted one week each year for the past several years to reporting on freedom of information. You can learn more about that at www.sunshineweek.org (<http://www.sunshineweek.org/>).

Q [Henry]: Hi Deborah and all colleagues in Uganda. First, thanks to Deborah for writing that wonderful guide.

A: Thanks so much, Henry. I am glad you are finding it useful.

IIP Moderator: Ms. Potter is the author of the State Department's new "Handbook of Independent Journalism (<http://usinfo.state.gov/products/pubs/journalism/index.htm>)." The handbook is available free online in HTML and PDF (<http://usinfo.state.gov/products/pubs/journalism/journalism.pdf>) format.

Q [Henry]: I can't agree more with almost everything that Deborah says in her book, except to ask, Why shouldn't Editors themselves get time off once in a while to report?

A: I think that's a great idea, as well. In fact, I've recommended to many newsrooms that they institute a kind of "job swapping" arrangement so people can experience how other people do their jobs. It can be eye-opening for a reporter to see what editors go through, and it can be a good reminder to editors of what their reporters are up against if they can get out and do some reporting once in a while.

Q [Henry]: Much as the basic principles in journalism hold for print, broadcast etc. What makes online reporting different for the traditional media channels?

A: One thing reporters do differently for online as opposed to broadcast or print is to think differently about their stories from the start. They need to realize that the medium really does change the message. Online news consumers are looking for lots of different things: interactive elements, graphics, maps, video, slide shows, and so forth. Reporters need to collect information they can use to create those kinds of online extras. That doesn't mean they have to experts at actually producing the online elements, but they need to understand what CAN be done so they come back with the necessary materials.

A few other things that journalists should know about the online audience:

They tend to be "skimmers." It may be tempting to write long stories for online use because there's no limit to what you can put on the Web. But surveys of users show they tend to browse for information, so very long stories are not that appealing. In addition, headlines and captions are even more important online than they are in print.

Beyond that, journalists writing for online media should provide access to more information in the form of hyperlinks.

IIP Moderator: Deborah, for students of journalism and young journalists, what personal and professional skills should they hone as they enter the profession?

A: I think young journalists should be curious and courageous -- both personally and professionally. Many young people I meet who say they want to be journalists don't seem to care much about the news. They think it would be an interesting job, but they don't know what it really takes to do it well. Journalists have to want to know what's really going on so they can keep the public informed. That means they shouldn't stop asking questions once they get the first or second answer. And they need courage because this isn't an easy job. They'll face obstacles and they may get discouraged. If they know why they really want to do this job, to seek the truth and inform people so they can make good decisions in their daily lives, they can overcome those obstacles.

Journalists also should be fair-minded people. They have to be able to put aside their own beliefs and listen to those of others so they can fairly represent them in the media. They have to care, deeply, about accuracy and be willing to check and re-check information to make sure they have it right.

And one more thing: They have to be willing to work hard!

Q [Irene]: Hello Deborah, based on my experience, I am inclined to think of 'independent media' as a fallacy, even an oxymoron. I tend to regard the independence of the media in terms of degree rather than absolutes. Is it practically possible for the media to divorce itself from the competing interests -- political, financial and even personal -- that have to be weighed every single day?

A: Perhaps another way of looking at this is to think of independence as a goal, not a given. I agree that it is a constant struggle to maintain an independent press. There is always pressure on journalists to influence news coverage, from governments or owners or sponsors. That can lead to self-censorship, with journalists avoiding certain kinds of stories because they're just too controversial.

Instead of divorcing themselves from competing interests, I think journalists need to be aware of them and to ask themselves how they can report every story in an independent way. Sometimes they may need to disclose to the public what's been going on behind the scenes, so the public can judge for itself just how independent the news media are.

IIP Moderator: Legendary journalist Edward R. Murrow is the subject of the State Department's online booklet, "About America: Edward R. Murrow, Journalism At Its Best (<http://usinfo.state.gov/products/pubs/murrow/>)." The publication is available for free download.

Q [PETER]: Thanks Deborah. What would you think are some of the greatest challenges facing African journalism in the 21st Century?

A: African journalists face many of the same challenges their colleagues face around the world to different degrees. In addition to the pressures from outside influences, they have to adapt to the needs of a changing audience and new media and the economics of the news business. I think one of the greatest challenges we all face is to maintain our credibility with the public so they will support us in our struggles.

Q [Henry]: I am sure Deborah has met many journalists from Africa, What are their major inadequacies and their strengths as compared to their American colleagues?

A: I hesitate to answer this because I try to avoid sweeping generalizations! Again, I think we all face similar challenges to different degrees. Some journalists overcome them; some don't. It's not about geography, it's about individual effort and institutional support no matter where you look around the world.

Q [PETER]: Overall, it is increasingly becoming difficult for journalists in Africa to stay in the profession perhaps due to some of the pressures you have outlined. How does one hang in there? Any tips please?

A: I see this phenomenon of "burn out" everywhere I go. It is difficult to maintain the energy and passion for the business when you are so often thwarted. One thing that can keep you fresh is working on a project or story that you care deeply about. You still have to do your daily work, but if you can also do a little bit along the way on a story that matters to you can keep the passion alive. Another thing that helps is having the support of colleagues. Journalists need to encourage each other.

When you get together, try not to spend the entire time complaining about how bad things are. Look at the good work you and others have been able to do despite the pressures, and let it inspire you to do more. Trainings, workshops and informal gatherings to share good work can do wonders to remind journalists why we got into this business in the first place. We know it wasn't the high salary or the great working conditions, right? A reporter I know talks about creating a "conspiracy of excellence," by which she means a group of journalists who challenge each other to keep doing good work even when their bosses don't support them. It can be energizing to have others whose work you respect push you to do even better.

Thanks for asking! (Shameless self-promotion follows.) NewsLab (<http://www.newslab.org/>) is a small non-profit devoted to journalism training. Our main focus is on broadcast journalism, but I also do workshops for print and online journalists. We have lots of resources for journalists available online and I hope you will find them useful.

IIP Moderator: Can you tell us a bit about your organization, NewsLab?

A: I have enjoyed our conversation today. Thanks again for inviting me to discuss journalism issues with you.

IIP Moderator: We would like to thank all of our participants in Uganda and Ms. Potter for taking the time to Webchat with us today. The Webchat is now closed.

A transcript of today's Webchat will be available on our USINFO Webchat Station (<http://usinfo.state.gov/usinfo/Products/Webchats.html>) within one business day.

(While guests are chosen for their expertise, the views expressed by the guests are their own and do not necessarily reflect those of the U.S. Department of State.)

(end transcript)

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